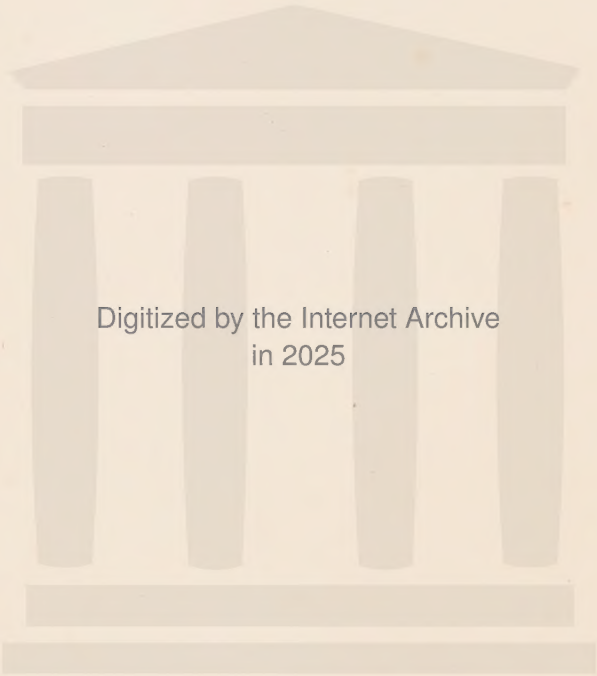
From Mrs Herbert Gladstone

to Mrs Ryerson

Sept 12 1883

SQUIRE LISLE'S BEQUEST.

VOL. III.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SQUIRE LISLE'S BEQUEST

BY

ANNE BEALE

AUTHOR OF

"FAY ARLINGTON," "THE PENNANT FAMILY,"
"ROSE MERVYN," "IDONEA,"
&c., &c.

"Truth, goodness, honour, harmony, and love,
The richest bounty of indulgent Heaven."
THOMSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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SQUIRE LISLE'S BEQUEST.

CHAPTER I.

UNEXPECTED ARRIVALS.

SPRING was spreading her soft and motley-feathered wings over France as well as England, and their warmth and brightness revived both inanimate and animate nature. Even Madame d'Angère came out of her shell, and ceased to shiver over the stoves she disliked but frequented. As to the chevalier and Aveline, they were like butterflies that had burst from the chrysalis. She seemed the embodiment of

spring, and she was so blythe and gay that she communicated some of her gladness to her benefactress. But her gaiety was temporary, while that of madame increased. The announcement that not only the newly-married pairs but Quiz were to visit the château, cast a shadow over Aveline's brightness, while it suddenly glorified the pathway of madame. It was evident that she had missed her old associates, and had been pining for them.

Aveline, however, had not much time for prophetic thoughts of evil. She was busy from morning till night preparing for the expected guests, and all her talents were exercised in renovating faded furniture, and making of the Belle Vue a fairy-palace for the reception of two brides. They had been travelling in different directions, and it was arranged that

they should meet and spend a few days at the Belle Vue. Quiz had been long expected, and was to arrive the day before her cousins.

According to promise, the chevalier left his wife and Aveline on the appointed day to meet Quiz. The excitement at the château was great at the prospect of the arrival of the nieces of its proprietors, and Aveline only wished she could rouse herself to feel the pleasure she fancied she ought to feel at seeing them again. But she was always more sensible of her dependent state when in company of the undisputed relatives of her friends. However, she nerved herself to believe that under new circumstances Quiz would be different, and spent the hours of the chevalier's absence either in talking over the coming events with madame, in putting

finishing touches to Quiz's pretty and foreign-looking room, or in marshalling the domestics.

It was night when the wheels of a voiture were heard rumbling up the drive. They could not be mistaken, for they were very creaky, belonging as they did to an ancient chariot that had lain perdu for half a century in the Belle Vue coach-house, and for the drawing of which horses were hired from a neighbouring hotel. Jean Lalage was installed as coachman, and adorned with the d'Angère livery, and madame was happy in the thought that her handsome niece, Quiz, should be received in the d'Angère carriage.

She, Aveline, the domestics, and the dogs were at the door when it drew up; but, as there was no moon, they could not see its occupants descend from it. Nothing but the shadowy forms of the

horses and their driver were at all visible.

'I am delighted to welcome you to our château,' said madame, while Loulou and Frou-Frou barked.

'And I am very glad to come; but we have had such a voyage,' returned a voice which was not Quiz's. 'I took you at your word, Amicia, and did not wait for an answer to my letter, which, it seems, never arrived.'

'Sophia! sister Sophia! Impossible!' exclaimed Madame d'Angère, as she found herself encircled in Mrs. Conquest's voluminous embrace.

'And here am I, auntie. Not left behind as lost luggage,' said Quiz, pressing forwards.

'And here is some one else, ma mie,' added the chevalier. 'But let us go into the salon and see one another.'

Madame led the way, and her guests

followed. Aveline remained hesitating in the doorway.

'Go also, ma petite. I will see to the luggage,' said monsieur.

'No one thinks of me but the chevalier,' she murmured, regretfully. 'But why should I expect it?'

She stole silently into the cheerful, well-lighted salon, and the first person she saw was—Leonard Leigh!

'Aveline, are you not astonished?' he said, meeting her almost as if he had been looking for her, and holding her hand several seconds in his.

'How do you do, my dear? I am glad to meet you again,' said Mrs. Conquest.

But Quiz's greeting was cold and almost silent; she touched her cheek with her lips, her hands with her fingers, and that was all.

But no coldness could check the flush

that coloured the girl's cheeks, the joy that filled her heart at sight of Leonard. Fear vanished, suspicion melted away when he was near. Pleasure and surprise took from her the power of speech, and she could only look her joy and her amazement. Madame d'Angère was as much delighted as she, and it took some time to explain so unexpected a surprise.

'The fact is,' began Mrs. Conquest, sinking into a chair, and speaking with difficulty, for want of breath, 'Quiz made herself so agreeable, that Mr. Conquest proposed my going somewhere with her, for change of air. I did not feel well enough, but almost at the last moment, as we could find no escort for her, I made up mind to come and see you, Amicia. I daresay it will be my death.'

'I wrote at once, aunt,' broke in Quiz, compassionating Mrs. Conquest's breath-

less condition. 'Uncle says you ought to have had the letter in time to prevent his meeting us; because Leonard was so gallant as to agree to accompany us, when he found that he was to have a chaperon. He is much too prudent to travel alone with an unprotected female.'

'Mr. Conquest could not leave London,' broke in Leonard, 'so he said he would frank me, if I would accompany the ladies, and I was only too glad to do so. You, madame, and the chevalier, gave me such a warm invitation, that I thought I might trust to your hospitality to welcome me.'

'I am sure we are delighted to see you,' replied Madame d'Angère. 'And I can't recover from my surprise. But where are you all to sleep? Aveline, where can you put them? I wish the letter had come.'

'There is no difficulty. Everything is

prepared, dear madame,' replied Aveline, cheerfully.

She had already settled that the unexpected guests were to occupy the apartments of the expected, temporarily, as they were prepared.

'La petite knows everything. She can improvise the very stars, when she wants them,' said the chevalier, coming in.

Aveline felt, rather than saw, that Quiz glanced at her, and that Madame d'Angère made an impatient gesture; but the innocent chevalier was unconscious of both. The presence of Leonard, her friend always, neutralized the effect of these mute suspicions.

He had been, thus far, true to himself, and the hasty resolution he made to Quiz. Mr. Conquest had asked him to accompany her as far as Dieppe, saying that it was impossible he could go, and he had no

one else whom he could ask. Leonard had demurred.

'I don't think Mrs. Dallimore would approve,' he said, diplomatically.

'But you are a sort of brother—a cousin, at least,' argued Mr. Conquest.

'No relation whatever. A kind of suspected person, on whom all the blame would fall if any *contretemps* occurred. And, in these days of railway murders and inquisitorial policemen, nobody knows what may happen. The "unprotected male" cannot be too particular.'

'I understand. Handsome girl, and all that sort of thing. You are cautious beyond your years,' laughed Mr. Conquest; and detailed the conversation at home.

Quiz was indignant, and her aunt was so amused, that she volunteered to play propriety, to the surprise and delight of

her husband, who took her at her word.

Leonard made no objection to escorting two ladies. He really longed to visit Fontainebleau, and, but for that previous stormy interview with Quiz, when he made up his mind to avoid private *tête-à-têtes* with young ladies, he would certainly have encountered the danger of accompanying her alone. And it would have been dangerous, for she was as fascinating as she was imperious.

A letter was written to Fontainebleau, announcing the change of plans, which, as we have seen, had not arrived when the chevalier started for Dieppe, but was delivered the following day, marked 'Too late.'

'I hope you will like your room,' said Aveline to Quiz, when she had conducted her to her apartment, while madame took possession of her sister. 'We have made

it as cheerful as we could. It overlooks the forest, and you will see in the morning what that means.'

'It is French, and that is enough,' replied Quiz. 'But how altered poor aunt is! What is the matter with her? Has she been seriously ill?'

'No, and we think her much better. She will get well, I am sure, now you are come. I am afraid she has missed her friends, and finds it difficult to accustom herself to the new life.'

'But the chevalier looks better than ever, and you appear flourishing.'

'He is at home in his own country, and I like the place and the people. Everyone is so kind to me. How is Lisle, and your sisters, and everybody?'

'Lisle has never got over his gormandising at the wedding. He is not strong, and is allowed to do just as he likes. The

rest are much as usual. Helen sent her love to you, or something of the sort, and I have a parcel from Lisle.'

'How kind of them! I think you are handsomer than ever, Quiz—I beg your pardon, Miss Elizabeth.'

It must be remembered that these two girls had been friends in childhood, and would, perhaps, have been so still but for the pride and jealousy of one of them. Aveline had a frank admiration of the beauty and talents of her rival, and would have been fond of her had she let her.

'Mademoiselle! mademoiselle! monsieur vous demande!' sounded through the half-open door, and Aveline left Quiz with a hasty apology.

The chevalier could do nothing without her, and there was a hitch in the preparations for supper. The food that would have sufficed for one guest was inadequate

for three. She immediately set to work to concoct an omelette and to increase the salad; for in France we do as the French, and Aveline had learnt from Marthe and Fanchon how to make many French dishes. She remained in the kitchen to superintend, while Fanchon transported them to the *salle-à-manger*, where supper was laid, and where the little family party soon assembled.

'I feel better already for the light air and digestible food!' exclaimed Mrs. Conquest, with a deep sigh. 'I am glad I came.'

'It is Aveline who has made that omelette,' said the chevalier. 'We found a treasure when we adopted her.'

'I wish the air and food agreed with me,' said madame.

But she forgot her complaints ere long, and began to expatiate on the elegance of

French manners and dress, and to describe particularly those of the family of her husband's early friend, the Marquis de Bellefontaine. She was particularly eloquent over the graces of the captain, who had frequently visited the Belle Vue since he first came there with Captain Moore, and through whose instrumentality the other members of his family had renewed or begun a friendship with the chevalier and madame.

'I think Captain de Bellefontaine and you are made for one another, Quiz,' she concluded, and Quiz caught Leonard's eye and coloured.

'I hope you have not said as much to him, auntie, as he may be disappointed if I am not,' she remarked.

'But I tink he admire our Aveline,' said the chevalier.

She came in at the moment, and every-

one looked at her, but she was too much preoccupied with household duties to observe it. Leonard rose to make room for her, and seated himself between her and and Mrs. Conquest; she soon became absorbed in the general conversation.

There was so much to say that the party sat long over the cream cheese, salad, fruit, *gâteaux* and *vin ordinaire* provided for them. Everything was new and delightful. As to Quiz, her spirits rose so high that the chevalier declared she was like ether; and even Mrs. Conquest forgot her Banting and her palpitations. Madame was supremely happy, and could not repeat often enough that 'After all there was nothing like one's own family,' to the distress of the chevalier and Aveline.

The newly-married pairs were expected in a day or two, and Mrs. Conquest declared that she should not survive more

introductions to nieces and nephews-in-law. This brought down Madame d'Angère's wrath upon the father of the bridegrooms, and an animated discussion arose concerning the discovery of Squire Lisle's second marriage. She persisted in considering Mr. Moore a snake in the grass, and Quiz heartily agreed with her. Both ladies were vehement in their disapproval of what they called his 'underhand and ungentleman-like conduct,' and inveighed more against him for bringing the marriage to light, and his sister for daring to enter their aristocratic family, than against Squire Lisle for making it. Mrs. Conquest declared herself indifferent, and said it only proved that all men were alike when their secrets were laid bare: which caused the chevalier to chuckle and say that she had discovered the secret of all religion.

Leonard listened in silence, shrugging

his shoulders and hugging himself mentally, when he reflected on his own part in this iniquitous business. What would they all think of him if they knew he had been its mainspring? Aveline also sat mute, and congratulated herself that she had, at least, no part in it, and therefore no blame could fall on her. She was already a bone of contention, but not in the matrimonial market-place, she believed. Lisle was too young; still, what would everybody say if the captain's proposal were made public?

When the ladies had exhausted this topic, madame had so many questions concerning the old friends she had left in the Isle of Wight, and the new she had made in London, that time sped on, and it was late when, at last, they retired to their *chambres à coucher*.

CHAPTER II.

THE PALACE.

WE will pass over the excitement consequent on the arrival of the newly-married pairs. Suffice it to say, they looked supremely happy, and were prepared to be pleased with everybody and everything. Their courtship had been smooth, and so, apparently, had their honeymoon. Aveline's ingenuity was put to the test, but not defeated. She turned out of her own room to accommodate Mrs. Conquest, and managed to provide a small chamber for Leonard, commanding a view of the palace

and its gardens. The château was quite full, and Madame d'Angère quite happy. This raised the chevalier's spirits to so elevated a pitch, that Aveline found him acting quite a pantomime before Polly's cage in their exuberance. The bird screamed and fluttered in concert, and there was nothing but enjoyment at the Belle Vue.

The first thing to be done was to visit the palace. All the party went. Aveline proposed to remain at home to superintend household matters, but the chevalier overruled this, assuring the rest that she was a better cicerone than the guides. She proved so, in fact; for the guides were so accustomed to her and the chevalier that they relaxed their vigilance, and no longer told their oft-repeated tale to them. The palace of Fontainebleau is so remarkable, both as regards its picturesque site in the

midst of the forest, its historical associations, and its piles of buildings and suites of apartments, that all personalities were forgotten in viewing it. The chevalier and Aveline acted as guides without remark, while the real guides accompanied the other tourists in their wanderings through the interminable rooms and corridors.

Aveline was charming when unembarrassed, and she told the tales she had learnt so well with the enthusiasm of a nature that circumstances alone could repress. Standing on the steps of the principal entrance, she pointed to the great Cour du cheval blanc, and said,

'It was here that Napoleon I. took leave of his Old Guard before he departed for Elba. I know not which is saddest, the farewell or the rooms in which he lived, which are very simple.'

'What a radical you are, Aveline! You

forget the "discrowned heads,"' said Leonard.

'That is impossible here, where every room recals them,' she replied. 'Was it not Louis Philippe, who died in exile, that restored the half-ruined and neglected pile?'

As the party roamed from room to room, Aveline manifested that her taste for reading, fostered by the chevalier, had been well cultivated. Leonard in particular, whose gifts were not unsimilar, was struck by it, and kept by her side throughout the tour of inspection. Quiz kept pretty close to him, and the rest followed, sometimes attentive to the descriptions of Aveline, at others to those of the chevalier. It is not easy to point out even the salient features of the works of art collected by monarchs during seven or eight centuries; it is still less easy to

recall the lives and deaths of the collectors. But at Fontainebleau, from the time of Francis I. to that of Napoleon III., both are well represented. Aveline's sympathies were with sorrow, whether merited or not, and she lingered rather in the spots where Monaldeschi was murdered by order of Christina of Sweden, where Pope Pius VII. was royally imprisoned, where Louis XIV. signed the revocation of the edict of Nantes, and where Henrietta Maria, queen of our Charles I., took refuge—than amid the gilded splendours of the apartments of Catherine de Medici, Diana of Poitiers, or of Madame de Maintenon. It was necessary to turn to the chevalier for details of the carvings, bas-reliefs, stuccoes, and paintings of the earlier times of Francis I., and even for the gobelins tapestries and oil-paintings of more recent date; but for the more modern decorations, with

their associations, all looked to Aveline.

'Is it not silent? Does not the echo of every footstep make one's heart beat?' she said to Leonard and Quiz, when they wandered into the apartments prepared for Marie Antoinette by Louis XVI.

'The silence is indeed oppressive. A palace tenanted by none save officials is a mournful sermon,' returned Leonard. 'Not only a "sermon in stones," but in satin, gilding, and Sèvres china,' he added, as they all gazed on the exquisite appointments of the salon tenanted by turns by a Marie Antoinette, a Joséphine, an Amélie, and a Eugénie.

'To have occupied these rooms, and reigned supreme in this palace; to have been worshipped by kings and courtiers; to have had, for a time at least, the desire of one's heart; to have commanded and been obeyed; to have lived in luxury and

refinement, must have made exile, and even death, endurable,' broke out Quiz.

She was standing over a screen of Sèvres china, on which was a peacock so exquisitely painted, that it seemed about to strut forth out of its frame—a screen presented to the unfortunate Marie Antoinette by the inhabitants of Sèvres, on her marriage, together with other fine specimens of porcelain. She looked supremely handsome, and Leonard and Aveline glanced at her with admiration.

'Oh, here you are,' broke in Madame d'Angère, who entered, breathless, followed by a stranger. 'Let me introduce Monsieur le Capitaine de Bellefontaine. My niece, Miss Elizabeth Dallimore. Mr. Leonard Leigh, a celebrated author.'

Captain de Bellefontaine bowed low before the royal-looking damsel to whom he was presented, and, for the moment,

saw no one else. Recovering from a too-apparent admiration, he bent to Leonard, and said something to Aveline, while Quiz glanced triumphantly at both.

She was never at a loss for conversation, and entered into it immediately with De Bellefontaine. Her French was imperfect, yet she made it amusing and interesting by her very mistakes. But Madame d'Angère gave her to understand that Captain de Bellefontaine spoke English well, and, with ready tact, she glided into that language, soon perceiving that he was only too glad to display his fluency in the English tongue. Madame stood gazing with uncontrolled pleasure at the pair, while Leonard and Aveline stood aside for the moment.

But the captain soon turned to the latter, with the natural politeness of his

people, and addressed her in French. He inquired concerning some subject that had previously interested them, and finally asked how much of the palace she and her party had explored. She told him. He then asked madame to be allowed to escort them through the remainder of the apartments. Madame said she believed her niece was the only lady at present unescorted, since the chevalier was marshalling the brides, and her sister was waiting for her in a neighbouring room. Then she added, aside, to Aveline,

'Mrs. Conquest is tired. Will you walk home quietly with her, Aveline? She is sitting in the Cabinet de Travail.'

'Perhaps I can assist her,' said Leonard; and, without waiting for a rejoinder, he followed Aveline into the small cabinet, where the great Napoleon used to work

and write. Seated at the round table on which the first Emperor signed his abdication, was Mrs. Conquest.

'When I see that good lady,' whispered Leonard to Aveline, in the adjacent corridor, 'I think of Sydney Smith. He said of a very large woman, "You might take your morning's walk round her, always provided there were frequent resting-places, and you were in rude health. I was once rash enough to try walking round her before breakfast, but only got half way, and gave it up exhausted." What would the inimitable Sydney have thought of volunteering to offer her his arm?'

Aveline laughed merrily, and they joined Mrs. Conquest.

'The chevalier will be the death of me; he talks and walks so fast,' she said.

The young people said they would be as

slow as she liked, and the trio walked leisurely from salon to salon. In the *salle du trône* erected by Napoleon, they found Captain de Bellefontaine and Quiz.

'I hate the Bonapartists!' Quiz was ejaculating.

'Ah, mademoiselle is what they call a Conservative. Qui sait?' they heard the captain reply in good English.

They met immediately, face to face. Quiz looked at Leonard as she passed him by, and whispered,

'Your prudence has secured a chaperon. I have secured a guide who can do without one.'

He seemed happy enough under his portly protector, and was content to wander slowly through the suite of rooms that had last been occupied by Napoleon III. and his lovely wife, and to listen to Aveline's graceful and pathetic descrip-

tions. Mrs. Conquest forgot her fatigue, and abandoned herself to the romantic feelings that all must experience wherever the unfortunate Marie Antoinette figured on her short stage of life. When Aveline touched, with a sort of timid reverence, the window-bolts of her boudoir, and said they had been fashioned for her by her lover, Louis XVI., Leonard remarked that they seemed a presage of the bolts and bars of her prison.

'It is only Carisbrooke over again, Aveline,' he said. '"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." Our ambitious countrywoman—Quiz—little understood what the tenants of these apartments had to bear when flight, exile, or the scaffold followed the glittering gewgaws of state. Better be a peasant girl, or the belle of a country neighbourhood.'

Discoursing and admiring, the trio went

from gallery to gallery, Mrs. Conquest leaning on Leonard's arm, and Aveline pointing out objects of interest. They did not encounter the rest of the party again, for the chevalier took his portion of it through the *salons de réception*, while Captain de Bellefontaine led Quiz rapidly from object to object, as one who was tired of what he surveyed, and enjoyed most the lively repartee and brilliant questions of the handsome girl he guided.

'We must see the theatre before we leave,' said Aveline. 'It is the only positively modern thing here, and was erected by the Empress Eugénie.'

'This looks like London in August,' ejaculated Mrs. Conquest, when they reached a circular theatre, the seats of which were enveloped in brown holland. 'You can walk round it while I rest.'

She sank down on one of the downy

cushions and surveyed the stage, the crystal chandelier, the gilded ceiling, the modern decorations. Even she felt a revulsion of feeling at the change from past to present. Leonard led Aveline to a distance, and there, where the royal actors of the world's stage had sat to watch those of the theatre stage, he told her of the inquiries made concerning her by the veiled woman, of Lilywhite at the church porch. He told her how that the unknown had declared herself acquainted with her and her mother, and had apparently come to Lisle in search of them; but he did not tell her the comments of Lilywhite. He watched Aveline's changing countenance while he was giving her this information, and was astonished to see how she turned from red to white, and listened with dilated eyes and parted lips.

'It was my dear mamma herself, it

must have been my dear mamma,' she exclaimed, when he ended, clasping her hands.

'Impossible, Aveline. I mention it to prepare you for any inquiry that may be made, any letter that may reach you,' replied Leonard.

'I ought to be in the island. I knew she would seek me there,' cried Aveline, heedless of his explanation. 'Oh, if we had never come here! Believe me, she did not drown herself, and has come again in search of me.'

'But the intermediate years? Where can she have passed them?'

'In an asylum, or, like Marie Antoinette, in prison, anywhere but in the chill water and cold grave. Help me to find her as you helped us both long ago, so that I may not be quite, quite alone in the world.'

'You, who have so many friends!' said Leonard, reproachfully.

'Only the chevalier and yourself. Madame is suspicious of me, I know not why; the rest dislike me—again I know not why. I strive to please them, I do indeed.'

'I know it, I see it, my poor child,' he said, holding out his hands involuntarily.

But she did not take them. She covered her face with hers instead, to stay her rising tears.

'I wish I had not told you. Try to calm yourself. Mrs. Conquest is observing us,' he said.

'I am calm already,' she replied, 'but I must seek my dear mamma.'

Leonard was surprised to see her turn instantly, with pale but composed face, and walk towards Mrs. Conquest.

'She must have had some strange ex-

perience of life since I saw her last,' reflected Leonard, following.

She certainly had: the experience of daily efforts to please a weak and jealous woman. Mrs. Conquest was making her observations on the little scene she had witnessed, but said nothing. She declared herself refreshed and ready to return to the Belle Vue. So the trio left the castle, pausing to remark on the heterogeneous pile of brick which might almost be called six castles, surrounded by six courts. Leonard, however, looked more at Aveline than the massive walls, and wondered how one naturally so gay and impressionable had acquired a self-command capable of turning aside the suspicions of Mrs. Conquest. On their way homewards, she was greeted by smiles from all whom she encountered, and he heard more than

once the words, 'La belle Anglaise,' follow her.

'Belle et bonne,' proclaimed some one in their wake, an opinion he was ready to endorse.

'You seem to have made many friends, Aveline,' he said, while supporting Mrs. Conquest's ponderous frame.

'Everybody likes the chevalier, and they are kind to me for his sake,' she replied. 'I love the peasants, and often visit them. They remind me of the villagers at Carisbrooke, and are quite as ready for a gossip or to relate their complaints.'

'Human nature is much the same everywhere,' said Leonard. 'In the country it is more transparent than in town, and therefore more easily understood.'

'Trying to understand human nature is most fatiguing,' puffed Mrs. Conquest. 'Happily there is no labour in finding out

what my new nieces are. They are transparent enough. But I can't make out Quiz. Can you, Mr. Leigh?'

'Ladies are beyond my comprehension,' replied Leonard, evasively, with a glance at Aveline.

When they reached the Belle Vue, they found that the chevalier and his party had arrived, and were talking over what they had seen; but there was no Quiz. Many inquiries were made for her, and Lucy laughingly suggested that she had eloped with the handsome Frenchman, adding aside to Leonard that, if he did not take care, he would be eclipsed.

'Why did you not keep with Quiz, Aveline?' asked Madame d'Angère.

'You told her to escort Mrs. Conquest, madame, and Quiz and the beau capitaine preferred their freedom. Two are company,' answered Leonard for Aveline, who

bestowed upon him a grateful glance.

The truants soon appeared, and overpowered the rest by their volubility. If Quiz was a great talker, De Bellefontaine was greater, and, to judge from their sparkling conversation, they had made considerable progress towards intimacy.

Aveline escaped to her favourite window in *l'appartement de ma mère*, and there let the suppressed tears flow for a few moments. She had, at the chevalier's request, appropriated this room, and resorted to it whenever she needed reflection and quiet. He knew her habits, and always sought her there when he wanted her—indeed, it was too apparent that he could not be long without her. On the present occasion his kindly, sympathetic heart had felt there was something amiss with her, and as soon as De Bellefontaine had made his adieux, having promised to return the

next day, he followed to discover what it was. Aveline's tears were scarcely dry when he joined her, saying, almost before he had closed the door,

'It was a contretemps, ma petite. My friend De Bellefontaine admires most les yeux bleus, the English eyes. I have often heard him say so. But he must be polite to the niece of my dear wife. Ha! ha! you have two captains at your feet.'

The honest, guileless man had been dreaming of a match between De Bellefontaine and Aveline, since he fancied she did not incline to Captain Moore. Aveline smiled through the tears as she turned from the contemplation of the soft, feathery, tasselled tops of the young larch and birch, clothing themselves in spring garments, towards her friend. She told him in few words what Leonard had told her of the woman in the white veil.

'It was my dear mamma,' she concluded. 'I must return to the island. I must be where she would naturally look for me.'

'Impossible, my child! Fontainebleau Cottage is let. It could not be your mother, who is with the good God. It was probably a stranger who had heard your story.'

'No, it is my dear mamma. She will expect to find me where she left me, either at Lisle or Parkhurst. Dear monsieur, I must go at all risks, even if I beg my way back to the island again.'

'Thou shalt not do that, ma petite, so long as we have a sou in our pockets. My Amicia and I will continue to befriend the child of our adoption.'

At these words Aveline's tears flowed afresh, and the chevalier, in seeking to comfort her, took her hand, put his arm round her waist, and called her by many

endearing epithets. At this moment the door opened, and the portly figure of Mrs. Conquest filled its frame, and filled it so well that madame and Quiz, who were in her wake, were unperceived. To account for their unexpected appearance, we must go down to the *rez de chaussée*, and see what the ladies were about while the chevalier and Aveline were together in the *boudoir de ma mère*.

CHAPTER III.

JEALOUSY.

WHILE the chevalier was consoling Aveline, Madame d'Angère, her sister, and her nieces were holding a consultation below stairs. The three gentlemen had gone out, and they were uninterrupted. Quiz had remarked casually that the chevalier seemed as fond of Aveline as ever, and this had loosed the sluices of her aunt's ill-suppressed jealousy. It poured forth in a flood that amazed her relatives.

'Ever since you opened my eyes to it,

Quiz, I have noticed it more and more,' she said, putting her be-laced handkerchief to her eyes. 'They are always together. I am quite neglected. I have been miserable ever since I left the island. What with the cold, and the dreadful stoves, and the language, and the chevalier's attention to Aveline, I have not even had the courage to wear my best dresses, or to receive visitors properly. I used to be first in everything.'

'So you are now, auntie,' interrupted Lucy. 'He looks on poor Aveline as a daughter.'

'A daughter! You must be blind!' ejaculated Quiz.

'I am surprised at her. I thought she was a nice, innocent girl till Quiz enlightened me,' remarked Mrs. Conquest. 'Now, I must confess, I think her very deep. I witnessed something very like love-making

between her and young Leigh when we were at the palace, and, if she has fascinated the chevalier as well, it is really too bad.'

Quiz flushed crimson. The tables were turned upon her.

'Love-making! what do you mean, Aunt Sophia?' she asked.

'Well; extended hands, tears, and those little demonstrations which old-fashioned girls would have considered as good as a proposal. But now-a-days they make love differently. You, for instance, went off alone with a stranger, which you and I would not have done, Amicia?'

'That was an accident,' remonstrated madame. 'But the chevalier and Aveline are always alone together.'

'I should think it was quite safe,' said Sophy.

'Is not the chevalier's property at his

own disposal?' asked Quiz, jealous in her turn.

This was a new idea to madame, and she began to cry.

'I never thought about his property, and I don't care either. It is himself and his love that I consider. And I should never have suspected him if you hadn't opened my eyes. Ever since then I have been wretched.'

Quiz's conscience smote her, and she might have made some amends for her malice, but for what she had heard concerning Leonard and Aveline. She had never forgiven him for the line he had taken when she accused him of engagement or flirtation with Aveline after that walk of theirs at Carisbrooke, and now the fact that they had been alone together if but for a brief interval, aroused her jealousy. If her aunt Conquest, who was

usually obtuse, had remarked upon them what might not have passed between them. Why was this girl, unknown and unbefriended, to be thrust between her and him she considered the friend and even lover of her childhood and girlhood? What of beauty or talent did she possess that was not quadrupled in herself? Why was she to be neglected by Leonard for this charity girl, this—this—

These thoughts coursed through her mind, and were interrupted by a sudden question of Mrs. Conquest.

'Where are they now?'

'Probably they are in the apartment of my Alphonse's mother,' sobbed madame.

'Let us come and see. Nothing like assurance,' said Mrs. Conquest. 'Of course all the rooms are open to you.'

Poor madame rose languidly and reluctantly. She had never yet stooped to be a

spy. Quiz rose also, but Sophy and Lucy had the good taste to remain where they were. Madame preceded her sister and niece up the polished staircase, and, when she reached the landing, pointed to a certain door.

'Go in if you like, I cannot,' she said.

The result we already know.

'Shame!' exclaimed Mrs. Conquest, from the doorway.

'I told you so, sister,' sobbed madame.

'I hope Leonard will be convinced and converted now,' thought Quiz.

The trio entered one after the other and the chevalier rose to meet them.

'Ma mie, la petite is bouleversée, because she thinks she has heard of her mother,' he began, but seeing that his wife was in tears, his sister-in-law dumb, and Quiz darting indignant glances at Aveline, he paused in the middle of the room.

Madame sheltered herself behind her sister, but Quiz came forward. She looked so aggressive, and Mrs. Conquest so ponderously indignant, that he was alarmed. A sob from his wife startled him, and he moved towards her. Mrs. Conquest turned as if to support her, and he exclaimed,

'Qu-est ce que c'est? What has happened? What is the matter, Mistress Conquest? What is it, Quiz?'

'Shame!' was the only word that came to the lips of the indignant sister, and 'You and Aveline know best,' came from Quiz.

Aveline, who had remained in the embrasure of the window where the chevalier had tried to comfort her, hearing and seeing what was passing as in a dream, caught those last words, and saw the scornful, mocking expression of Quiz's face. She advanced towards her, and in her turn

asked what was the meaning of this distress. Quiz pointed to her aunt, and made no reply. Aveline ran to madame, with the words, 'What is the matter, dear madame?' but madame fell into her sister's arms with a little hysterical cry.

The scene would have been comic but for its reality. The chevalier embraced his wife and laid her on the sofa, demanding, with native effusion, what had caused the calamity, while Aveline left the room, and returned with a bottle of eau de cologne. Madame d'Angère had not actually fainted, but had merely momentarily succumbed to what seemed to her a confirmation of the suspicions excited in her. When she recovered, Aveline was bending over her, holding the lace handkerchief, saturated with eau de cologne, to her nose, while the chevalier was calling upon her in pathetic tones to recover. Seeing Aveline first

when she opened her eyes, she exclaimed,

'Leave the house, ungrateful girl! You have alienated from me the affections of my Alphonse!'

Aveline drew back and looked from one to another. She understood in a moment the mystery of the past months. Her benefactress was jealous of her. She cast appealing glances at Mrs. Conquest and Quiz, but was met by stony or averted eyes. The chevalier was occupied with madame, seeming to comprehend only that she was restored to him, though comprehending all, and Aveline felt that she was alone with these suspicious women. What could she say—what do? She clasped her hands and uplifted a moment her blue eyes, then said, slowly, humbly, yet fearlessly,

'Ladies, I know not in what I have offended. Will you kindly tell me, that I may explain?'

There was no reply; Mrs. Conquest looked awful, Quiz magnificent.

'Madame, dear madame, what have I done?' she continued, turning to the couch, and bending over her benefactress.

'Done! You have ruined my peace, withdrawn from me the affections of my husband, and been a—a—snake in the grass,' replied that aggrieved wife, waving her off and clinging to the chevalier.

Aveline withdrew a few paces and looked at her with appealing glance; but she knew her too well to remonstrate, besides, there was an expression on her usually childish face that she had never seen before. The pale blue eyes were kindled into flame, and she seemed beside herself. Aveline stood a moment, as if transfixed with surprise or grief, then, with an air of innocent dignity, quietly passed before her adversaries and left the room.

It was then the chevalier's turn to assert himself.

'I think, ladies, we are best alone,' he said, looking at Mrs. Conquest and Quiz. 'This is a little misunderstanding that I can clear up best without the spectators.' His manner was decided, although slightly ironical, and, as the portly Mrs. Conquest and her magnificent niece followed Aveline, he shrugged his shoulders and muttered in French, 'Oh! these women! these women!'

He crossed the room after them, and closed and bolted the door; then he returned to his wife's sofa, and took a chair opposite it. She had the lace handkerchief to her face, and was sobbing violently.

'Amicia,' he began, severely, 'who has been poisoning your mind against the petite?'

He received no answer.

'It is not of yourself that you have conceived these suspicions,' he continued. 'You are naturally as innocent as—the child. Be not impatient. She is pure as the light. We have for each other the affection of father and daughter. You, also, would have felt as the mother for this child of our adoption, but for the bad tongues.'

Madame waved one hand, as if expressing a negative, still keeping the other to her face.

'Non? eh, bien! thou art more unnatural than I thought thee. Behold, an orphan! young, pretty, gentle, amiable, who has been to us as servant, companion, child, for nearly ten years. She has devoted herself, her time, her talents, her pretty ways, her innocent love, since her poor mother's death, to you and me. We

have both embraced her, almost as parents, while she is growing up, and, now that she is in her adolescence, you suspect me of transferring my love of husband from you to her, because I embrace her still! Ma foi! It is inconceivable.'

The chevalier actually laughed, which caused madame to remove the handkerchief and look at him. He certainly had not the appearance of a Lothario, as he sat there, elderly and round, the finger of his right hand on the palm of his left.

'But, Alphonse——' she murmured.

'Hein, madame! Thou avowest thine error? Non! Bien. Then we shall send the child away, and thou wilt be sorry and repent. Ma foi! It becomes tragic. Shall I take an oath? Non; the Sainte Evangile forbids it; but since no longer believing in my love for you, why, I can no longer trust yours for me, and perhaps

you had better return to your native land with your sister, and leave me alone in mine. I was solitary when first you condescended to love me ; I will be solitary again.'

The chevalier's voice faltered, and madame's handkerchief fell into her lap. She looked at him aghast. But the green-eyed monster still held her in his fangs.

'And Aveline?' she murmured, interrogatively.

'La petite ? The orphan who loves us ? She must seek her fortune in the cold world. You at Carisbrooke, I at Fontainebleau, the child with strangers ; sans doute, we shall be happiest in separation.'

'I never thought you could be so cruel, Alphonse!' sobbed madame, now really adding briny tears to the handkerchief already surcharged with scent.

'It is not I—it is you, ma mie.'

Husband and wife sat opposite one another awhile without speaking. The kindly, excitable Frenchman put strong pressure on his feelings, she gave way to hers. They were sincerely attached to one another, but each was quite in earnest.

'I—I—should be happy again—but—for——' she sobbed.

'For la petite?' he supplied. 'She is in your hands, madame. I shall see her no more. It is for you to dismiss her. Such money as I possess is at your disposal. You can now propose to Mrs. Moore to receive her, as you formerly desired. Her sons are here, and will judge of the propriety of her conduct as men can, who are not prejudiced.'

The chevalier rose in his excitement and began to pace the room. This brought his wife to her senses.

'I never said her conduct was impro-

per, Alphonse. I only fancied you were fonder of her than of me. You know you have walked, and read, and studied French, and been almost more with her than with me; and I hate being alone; and you used never to leave me before Aveline came. And—all through the winter—indeed! I—I—was very poorly—when—when—I tried to be well.'

'Mon amie!' he exclaimed, stopping in his troubled walk at her side. 'Is this of your own conception, or has it been suggested to you?'

'I do not know. But many have said that Aveline was deceitful, and trying to undermine your affection from me. I wish she had accepted Captain Moore. I tried to persuade her, and, when she refused, I felt sure it was because she loved you best.'

The poor chevalier was in despair.

What could he say to one so selfish and silly? He seated himself by her, and assured her that she was altogether mistaken. He reasoned with her, and did his best to represent to her that he had never, by thought, word, or deed, forfeited her affection. But she had been forced into the belief that Aveline had come between them, and nothing short of an earthquake could set her mind right again. He now understood her various moods, and reproached himself for not having seen through such transparent veils before. He even accused himself for not having humoured them, forgetting that he had not been without his own whims since his return to Fontainebleau.

'I will atone for the past, ma mie,' he suddenly exclaimed, placing himself on the sofa at her side, and taking her hand.

'Assure thyself that I adore thee still. We will return to our *premiers amours!* but it must be in perfect faith.'

In another moment, he was on one knee, and, had Quiz but seen him, she would have forgotten her personal malice in amusement at what she would have called a comedy—yet it was a serious comedy truly.

But Quiz was shut up with Mrs. Conquest in her bed-room, while her cousins had strolled out with their bridegrooms, to enjoy the cloudless sky and listen to the songs of the birds. As yet, they knew nothing of the demon, Jealousy, and forgot, in their happiness, what their aunts and cousin had left their presence to discover.

Leonard was the only person in the reception-rooms below stairs; for he had abstained from accompanying the 'honey-

moonists,' as he styled them, for fear of being in the way. He was reading the 'History of Fontainebleau' when he was startled by the sudden entrance of the chevalier.

'Bon! mon ami, Léonard, I am glad,' he began, evidently in great excitement. 'We are at six and seven in this château. It is on Aveline's account. All the ladies are jealous. And, ma foi, it is of me! I am flatterd, but not elevated. I swear to see the child no more, at present, till the dust is wiped from the eyes of madame. But she has gone, so says Fanchon, alone into the forest. Will you follow her? She has entered by the gate yonder, and, I wager, has gone to the Valley of Rocks. If you hasten, you will overtake her. Keep to the right, along the grande route. At the worst, you will find guides at the Hermitage. Bring

her back. Tell her I say madame has the eyes opened, and all will be adjusted. For me, I go to disturb the *nouveaux mariés*, who are yonder in my plaisance. Hélas! that word recalls our dear cottage. Go, my friend Léonard. There is no time to lose. I am about to propose that the petite pay a visit to Mrs. Moore.'

Leonard hurried off, 'unchaperoned,' and the chevalier hastened through an orchard in full bloom, to a green allée that ran parallel with the forest. Here he found Stephen Moore and Lucy. He began, without circumlocution, to tell them that circumstances had occurred which made it desirable to find a temporary home for Aveline, and he asked them to write to Mrs. Moore, and inquire whether she were still willing to receive her. The young people, who understood his difficulty, assured him that Mrs. Moore had

expressed a wish to have her only a day or so before their marriage, and that they had no doubt of her receiving her at once.

'She was the dearest child I ever saw, and she is now the very sweetest girl in all the world,' said enthusiastic Lucy. 'I wish we were settled in our house at Kensington, and she should come and stay with us, should she not, Stephen?'

He smiled his assent, and the chevalier blessed her for a kind-hearted, generous woman. But then she was married to a man of her choice, and Quiz, of whom the much-exercised Frenchman was thinking, was not, as yet, married at all, and was apparently jealous of his adopted daughter. He was in a state of great excitement. He knew not what Aveline might do in her dismay at the suspicions they had

roused. He blamed himself for an old fool for not having been made aware, when at Carisbrooke, that it was jealousy which caused his wife to wish to be rid of the poor child. He had been living with shut eyes, he thought, he an elderly man who looked on her as his daughter.

He laughed at the ridiculous idea; he hastened back to see if Leonard was gone. Yes, Fanchon had seen him leave the house. He went to find Jean Lalage, and sent him off in another direction; he stumbled upon the gardener, and dispatched him also. He was beside himself. He thought that, if anything happened to Aveline, he should actually get rid of his life, and forgot his Amicia and her devotion to him. He mentally sent all women to the limbo where he wished them, and wandered hither and thither, abstaining

from returning to his disconsolate wife, whom he had left in floods of penitential tears.

CHAPTER IV.

MOONLIGHT IN THE FOREST OF FONTAINEBLEAU.

A STRANGE, wild, desolate spot is that rocky valley in the midst of the forest of Fontainebleau—a wilderness of stone as far as the eye can reach. On an elevated rock in its centre sat Aveline, with Frou-Frou on her lap. From the verge of the precipice she seemed to be contemplating the arid waste before her; overhead a cloudless sky; right and left low brushwood and hardy plants springing from rocky clefts; beneath a chasm; on the far horizon, miles away, Nature's for-

tresses looking like pinnacles and towers. It was here Aveline was wont to come when she desired solitude, and hither she had sped when ordered by her benefactress to quit the house.

It was a long way from the château, and the hasty walk, in addition to previous fatigue and terror, had wearied her. The sun was setting, and his golden rays kindled the broom and heath that concealed her point of observation into radiance, and touched with life the variegated greens of a spring evening. May was about to yield up her empire to 'leafy June,' just as, in the forest and palace, reign had succeeded reign in rapid succession, sometimes amid tranquil skies, at others beneath howling thunder.

Aveline's short career in sunny France was to end, if not in the guillotine or exile, at least in banishment. As kings

and emperors with their consorts had taken flight, so, she thought, must she; and if they were maligned and insulted, why not a friendless girl, who had no claim either on nations or individuals?

She was quite calm, and composed herself with the reflection that she had done nothing wrong, and that she should therefore be guided aright by One who had hitherto protected her. This thought brought her to her knees. There, in the vast solitude, with the halo of sunshine around her, and a piece of broom-crowned rock for her altar, she knelt and asked the Most High to point out to her what He would have her to do. The jutting rock against which she leaned was between her and the precipice, so she was safe from harm, and she knew that her Heavenly Father would not desert her. It was strangely pathetic to see Frou-

Frou, displaced from her lap, 'sit up' at her side, and, hanging his limp little paws, appear also to be supplicating something, he knew not what.

'Be pleased to lead me to my dear mamma, whether on earth or in heaven,' was the burden of her prayer; but she also asked that her kind friends might be shown the fallacy of their suspicions.

While thus occupied, one of the white-capped female guides appeared at a little distance. She was followed over the rocky, intercepted pathway by Leonard. He had fortunately met with her, and made her understand what and whom he was seeking.

'Voilà la bonne demoiselle, la belle Anglaise,' said the guide, pointing to Aveline.

Leonard hastily gave her a coin, and said he would return with Aveline; and

she departed, uplifting eyes and hands, and muttering that the demoiselle they all liked was 'very holy, kneeling there all alone in prayer to the good God.' Leonard paused a moment, not liking to disturb Aveline; but Frou-Frou, conscious of his approach, barked and startled her. She rose and perceived him. A colour like the rosy hue of the sunset heaven around them flushed her face, which was very pale before, and she made a half deprecating gesture.

'The chevalier has sent me to look for you, Aveline, and I should have been benighted in this interminable forest but for a voluble lady who knew all about you, and discoursed in French on every object we encountered,' he began, with affected nonchalance.

'It was Elize Malin, one of my friends,' replied Aveline, reassured by his manner.

'Elize Malin! That must be Quiz,' said Leonard. 'Elize by name; malin or maligne by nature. Why are women so jealous of one another? Will you sit down for a few moments; I wish to speak to you. It is an ambassage of peace, so you need not be afraid; and I come in the name of the chevalier.'

There was a rough bench at no great distance, and they seated themselves. Wishing to give her time, he asked her why she had come so far, and what were her surroundings.

'It is where the dear empress loved to sit, and it is solitary,' she replied. 'What did the chevalier say?'

She fixed her clear, fearless eyes on Leonard, and he told her, laughing as he did so, not understanding the gravity of the situation, though suspecting mischief.

'He insisted on the fact that madame's

eyes were opened, and that I was to bring you back,' he said, in conclusion.

'I cannot return. Madame ordered me to leave the house, and the other—ladies—looked at me as if—I cannot meet them again. I have resolved to go back to the island and find my dear mamma, or, at least, search for the wearer of the white veil.'

'But have you any invitations in the island? You cannot leave until you know where to go, and have some one to travel with.'

'The mistress of the Blue School told me to return to her if I wanted a home, and the matron of the workhouse would befriend me. Thence I came, and thither I must go. I am not afraid of retracing my steps by the route by which we came.'

'What has caused this sudden resolution, Aveline? Neither workhouse nor

Blue School is suitable for you. The chevalier hinted at some sudden annoyance, but that will pass off, as others have done before. Quiz seems to carry dynamite with her, though she is not really bad at heart. Like many another conspirator, she does not know the mischief she may do. What has caused this family disturbance?'

Aveline coloured, but answered without reserve. She believed in her first friend and brother as in herself.

'The chevalier loves me too well, madame not enough. I was telling him what you had just told me, and I foolishly cried. He comforted me; madame, Mrs. Conquest, and Miss Elizabeth Dallimore came in. They used some strange expressions. Madame nearly fainted, and, when she returned to herself, said words that I can never forget, and ordered me to leave the house.'

'By Miss Elizabeth Dallimore, you mean, Quiz?'

'Yes.'

Leonard was astonished at the girl's proud dignity of manner. He had only, hitherto, noticed its simplicity. He remained a moment silent, thinking of what would be best under the circumstances. At last,

'The chevalier proposes that you should go to Mrs. Moore's, who once wished you to—to pay her a visit.'

'I believe she would have had me as a sort of companion. But—but I cannot go there.'

'She is alone, Aveline. She wants some one to replace her sons and daughters-in-law. My cousin Lucy was saying only this morning that she liked you better than anyone. You surely would not refuse if she were to ask you? It seems almost

providential, if you are to leave the chevalier and madame for a time. Be assured they will not let it be for long. They could no more do without you than without the parrot and the dogs.'

Aveline smiled, and Leonard repeated his question.

'Why will you not go, for a few months at least, on a visit to Mrs. Moore, since Lucy says she would gladly ask you?'

'She is very kind, but I cannot, I cannot.'

Involuntarily Aveline covered her face with her hands, thought of Captain Moore's proposal, and repeated the only words she had used in reply to it. Then starting up, she added,

'It is getting dark. We shall lose our way.'

The sun had indeed set, and the twilight was beginning. The path to the

main road was intricate, and lay through boulders and brushwood, and over rocks and briers. They threaded it almost in silence, Aveline leading the way. The moon had risen when, at last, they reached the grande route.

'What will they say now?' she murmured, as if addressing the Frou-Frou she was carrying. 'Will you take the dog home, Mr. Leonard? I cannot go back to the Belle Vue: Elize Malin will give me shelter for the night. She lives quite near.'

'You must return with me, Aveline,' said Leonard, decidedly. 'You would, indeed, confirm the foolish words of silly, jealous women if you absented yourself.'

She obeyed instinctively, and walked rapidly by his side, he carrying Frou-Frou. But he perceived that she trembled, and that she looked startingly pale beneath the

moonlight. It was a still and lovely night. The birds were silent, the woodman's tools were laid aside, the breezes scarcely moved the leaves of the trees. The flickering moonbeams glanced through the leaf-wrought roof, and played fantastically on pathways and tree-trunks, turning the white stems of the birch into ghostly tenants of the forest, and occasional fern-fronds into their silvery footstools.

'A night for lovers and lovers only,' thought Leonard, as he glanced into the fair pale face, upon which the moonshine gleamed. The careful, cautious Leonard, who had resolved never again to be *tête-à-tête* with woman! Yet he was chivalrous and tender-hearted, and weak too upon occasion. And Aveline, how fair and sweet she was—how unprotected and lonely!

Is it love or chivalry that moves him? Who shall say?

'Aveline!' he whispers, softly, as if fearful of the ears of the silent night—'Aveline!'

She turns her moon-lit eyes towards him, pure and liquid as the dewdrops on the slumbering blue-bell.

'Will you give me the right to protect you?' he whispers on, the hushed breezes scarcely catching the words. 'Will you think of me as nearer and dearer than the brother you called me when a child? I have never forgotten the kindly epithet—I, who, like you, have neither brother nor sister, father nor——' He pauses on the word 'mother,' knowing her heart. 'Will you try to forget all the sorrows and neglects of your life, and to remember that you have one, at least, who feels every pang you feel as acutely as yourself, and who would do his utmost to spare you a regret, even? Dear Aveline, I have little

to offer you beyond hope. We are young, and can venture to look forward. We trust in divine Providence, and need not be discouraged. May I—may I ask your love?'

'Hush! hush!' she breathes, pausing in her rapid walk, clasping her hands, and looking imploringly at him. 'Do not tempt me so. I cannot—I dare not!'

'And why, Aveline? We are both almost alone in the world. I love you dearly. With your love in return, I could fight with fortune and win the battle. I have now the prospect of a post that may lead to competence. The path to fame I have already set foot on.'

'And would you have me fetter you at its commencement? Shall I, whom you have befriended, be your first obstacle? Never, Mr. Leonard, never!'

'I fancied—I flattered myself that the

child-love might grow into that of the woman, as with me it has ripened into that of the man. Can it be so, Aveline?'

'Oh! why will you ask me? You, who have been always my friend—you forget the space between us. You are well-born, well-bred, surrounded by friends and admirers—on the road, as you say, to fame; and—oh, I am glad! I am glad!—I am but a poor charity-girl, dependent on strangers, turned from the home that sheltered me, accused of base ingratitude, and about to roam the world in search of my mother, who lives—yes, I feel she lives!'

Aveline stays her speech, puts her hands forward as if to brush away some spectre in her moon-lit path, and resumes her rapid walk.

'You only adduce reason upon reason for giving me the right to aid you,' urges

Leonard, his voice rising in his eagerness to secure a hearing, and each obstacle only heightening his resolution. 'Were we engaged, no one would dare to malign or suspect you.'

'You are mistaken,' she replies, in much agitation. 'If they think me designing now, they would then look upon me as a hypocrite; they would speak of my mean position, of my poor insane mother, of my ingratitude—and oh! I am not ungrateful. I would serve any of them to-morrow if I could. Miss Elizabeth Dallimore would accuse me of—— But no, I will not return evil for evil, jealousy for jealousy. I know she does not really wish to harm me.'

'Dear Aveline, if you only loved me,' breaks in Leonard.

He does not see her tears, her suddenly flushed face, or hear the beating of her

heart. All that is audible to him are those words, uttered once before on a similar occasion, 'I cannot, I cannot.'

And with them they reach the forest-gate. Suddenly she looks at him and holds out her hand. The old smile is on her lips, the dimples on her cheeks, the light in her eyes. She is again the child of years ago.'

'Thank you, oh, thank you!' she says. 'I now know that you believe in me, and that I have not lost my friend, my first benefactor, my dear, dear brother.'

He takes the hand, presses it, and passes out into the road leading to the Belle Vue.

There, all was consternation and remorse. The whole house was astir. Aveline had never before been out alone after sunset, and no one supposed that Leonard, a stranger to the forest paths, would find her. Jean Lalage had been, we know, sent

in search, and Fanchon went of her own accord. The chevalier declined to move, but what his feelings were none of his womankind knew. Dinner passed almost in silence, and even Quiz was incapable of rousing a laugh. Indeed, she felt very uncomfortable, and, being rather vain than wicked, her conscience pricked her, and she began to fear that Aveline, her rival, might come to some unfortunate end. What if she were to destroy herself? Such things had happened, and she would not care to win Leonard at such a cost.

As to Madame d'Angère, she had never been so excited in her life. The chevalier had convinced her of the absurdity of her suspicions, but had succeeded in doing so by a gravity of demeanour and speech that troubled her even more than his kindness to Aveline. Save in that 'first quarrel,' he had always shown her the easy courtesy

and affection of a nature averse to demonstration of the deeper feelings; but now she perceived that there was a well beneath the quiet flow of his humour, capable of throwing up impetuous waters. She did not understand him, but she felt this sudden revelation of a second self, and, while she believed, she feared.

She secretly acknowledged that she had misjudged him and Aveline, and, now that Aveline had departed, she was longing for her return. Her sister and nieces surrounded her; she almost wished they had never come. Besides, Frou-Frou had gone with Aveline, and Loulou was miserable without him; quite as miserable as she should be bereft of the chevalier. Her tearful eyes and melancholy voice might have melted a stone, but her Alphonse was harder than a stone, and would not melt. He was hurt and offended, and no little

blandishment on her part could change the iron severity of his usually good-humoured face.

As to the *nouveaux mariés*, they wished themselves in the train, steaming it anywhere away from Fontainebleau; and Mrs. Conquest repented heartily that she had ever left the comfortable repose of her house on Hampstead Heath.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Leonard entered the salon, alone. There was a general outcry, but it was Quiz who started up to meet him, and to ask, with a blanched face, if he had found her.

'Yes, on the verge of a precipice,' he replied; for he could not resist alarming her.

'She—she—was not thinking——' she began, the remainder of the sentence being lost in the hubbub of voices.

'She is safe? You have seen her? and

here is Frou-Frou, my pet! my darling, I am thankful,' cried madame; and that mongrel leapt on her lap.

'Where was she, Léonard, mon ami?' asked the chevalier, his teeth chattering.

Leonard told briefly what had happened, the love passage excepted. He said, gravely, that it was with difficulty he could prevail on Aveline to return to the house with him, and that she had gone, he believed, to her room.

'She said that she was too weary to face the company,' he added, with a glance at Quiz; then to the chevalier. 'She assures me that she intends to leave at once for the island.'

'Non, non; we will overrule that. Madame, ma femme, will go at once to her chamber. She is safe. Dieu merci, dieu merci,' said the chevalier, tears starting to his kind eyes.

'I don't think you will prevail on her to remain,' continued Leonard. 'She believes her mother appeared actually in the flesh on the day of the weddings, and she wishes to go in search of her. She would scarcely consent to spend the night, even, in the château.'

'Go, Amicia. Console her, persuade her,' said the chevalier to madame. 'You alone can. Your sisters will mount to their chambers without your conduct. Léonard and I will await you here.'

It was impossible to misunderstand the chevalier. His wife hurried off to Aveline, his guests to their rooms, and he, Leonard, and Quiz remained behind. She had resolved to see the game played out.

'I hope this is not your doing, Quiz. If so, you would have repented had you seen Aveline, alone and on her knees in

the solitude of the forest,' said Leonard.

'You have found her. I am glad,' was the half penitent, half defiant answer.

CHAPTER V.

RECONCILIATION.

WHEN Madame d'Angère sought Aveline, she found her in the *boudoir de ma mère*. As she crept stealthily into the room, she saw a figure in white, kneeling before the sofa on which she and her Alphonse had become partially reconciled, and she started back, wondering if it might be the ghost of *ma mère*. She carried a candle, but there was no other light in the room, save that of the moon. The words, in Aveline's voice, 'that anyone should love me so!' partly reassured

her, though a pang of jealousy troubled her, lest the 'anyone' should be the chevalier. She perceived that the sofa had been arranged as a bed since she was last there, and concluded that it was the girl's temporary nightly couch. She had not inquired where she had settled to sleep when she turned out of her own room to accommodate Mrs. Conquest.

She made a little, hesitating cough, which caused Aveline to start up, and draw back with a sort of terror when she recognised her visitor. Her long hair hung loosely over the white night-gear, her eyes shone in the moonlight; and madame also trembled. Both were silent, until Aveline, with clasped hands, exclaimed:

'I should not have disobeyed you by returning here to-night, had not Mr. Leonard insisted. But I will leave early to-

morrow. I would have made arrangements to-night, but I wished to disturb no one, so came here unobserved. I did not mean to annoy you by seeing you again.'

This was spoken with agitated rapidity.

'I—I—merely came to say—that—that I think I was mistaken,' returned madame, in a weak, peevish voice.

Aveline's hands and eyes were thrown upwards, and in another moment she was on her knees, clasping her arms round her late benefactress.

'You are sure, dear madame? You no longer misdoubt me? You know that I would lay down my life for you?'

'I am quite sure that the chevalier loves me best, Aveline; and you understand that I could never allow anyone to come between us.'

This was said with a sort of childish

vanity, and, as Aveline rose, she felt that the reconciliation would be as superficial as the anger had been. Madame put down the candlestick and seated herself. Aveline stood near her.

'The chevalier hopes that you will go on as usual,' said the former. 'But, between you and me, Aveline, people make remarks. You see, you are not really his daughter, only——'

'Only your servant and humble companion,' supplied Aveline, pride getting the better of her. 'I know too well what I am, and I have tried never, never to forget it. I should not, but for dear monsieur's—and—your—kindness. I shall be grateful to you both all my life. I hope, when I am far away, you will try to think tenderly of me, and believe that I never, willingly, offended you.'

'Far away? What do you mean, Aveline?'

'That when I am back in England, in some other situation, looking for my dear mamma, I trust you and the chevalier will think of me and pray for me, as I shall for you.'

Madame began to cry. She had not expected this.

'But we do not mean you to leave us, Aveline. Who would wash the dogs and clean the parrot? Who would see to my wardrobe, and the housekeeping, and various other matters?'

'You will have Miss Elizabeth Dallimore with you, dear madame. And, when she leaves, your other nieces will come. You have many friends.'

'But I quite believe in you now, Aveline. Indeed, I don't think I should ever have thought about it, if they hadn't put it into my head. These things are so perplexing, and one don't like to be twitted

with hints that one's own husband likes any lady better than oneself. Besides, he is quite altered. His manners are changed, and he is—almost—unkind. I expected to be so gay and happy when my relations came, and Captain de Bellefontaine made their acquaintance, and the neighbours called, and we showed them how much we were considered, and now——' she paused.

'Now it is only a temporary disappointment,' put in Aveline, gravely. 'You will all be as bright as ever when I am gone'—her voice choked slightly—'and, madame, you will then understand that I never meant to cause you pain.'

'But you are not to go, Aveline. The chevalier says so. He will be graver than ever if you do. And as to me, it makes me quite ill; indeed, I shall not recover it for a long time. It is very hard upon me,

who have done everything for the best. But I really must go to bed, and you are undressed, and can't help me,' replied madame, irritably.

'I had better not to-night,' said Aveline. 'May I kiss you once more?'

Madame held up her cheek, and Aveline put her arms round her and embraced her. Both were in tears, but Aveline knew that those of madame were evanescent as her feelings.

While this was passing, the chevalier, Leonard, and Quiz were awaiting the result in the salon; the rest of the party had retired. Neither of the trio knew exactly what the other thought, and spoke with caution. The chevalier was pacing the room, Leonard turning over the leaves of a book, Quiz glancing from one to the other with a face half of annoyance, half of amusement. The lamp was waning, and

the moonlight stole through the jalousied windows into the ancient salon.

'If they should quarrel, and if madame ma femme should decide not to keep her, Madame Moore would receive her,' ejaculated the chevalier, as if to himself.

'Aveline declines decidedly to go to her,' returned Leonard, without looking up from his book.

'Pardieu, I forgot,' cried the chevalier, stopping short, and rubbing his hands through his scanty hairs. 'Forgive the serment, but I am half mad. These ladies, they are terrific. Take care of them, Leonard.'

'I will,' replied Leonard, remembering his late shortcomings.

'He does,' laughed Quiz, trying in vain to catch his eye.

'But of a certainty Aveline refuses Mrs. Moore on account of the proposal. She

is prudent as Diana,' said the chevalier.

'What proposal?' asked Quiz.

'The one which the Captain Moore made for her here at Christmas,' replied the chevalier, off his guard. 'Had she accepted it, these complications would not have arrived; and his twelve months are not expired before next Christmas. Ma foi, it is perplexing! and it is Madame Conquest who has done the mischief, and she with the embonpoint that supposes the phlegmatic!'

A sharp pang shot through Leonard's heart, but he felt that the eyes of Quiz were upon him, and he mastered all outward sign. Quiz turned pale and bit her lip for jealousy. Her returning better feelings were overpowered by this fresh discovery of Aveline's success over herself, and her temporary self-restraint gave way.

'She knows how to play her cards. I

hope, Leonard, you will now be convinced what a flirt she is,' she said. 'Pray don't make-believe to be reading that book,' she added, irritably, pushing a stray ornament against his volume.

'I daresay she is, Quiz—you all are,' he replied, shutting the book with a bang, and arming himself for argument.

'I can endure the suspense no longer!' shouted the chevalier, and left them together.

'Pray don't go, monsieur. Leonard will be obliged to wake up Aunt Conquest, and she hates playing chaperon; she told me so,' cried Quiz, ironically.

'He is gone, and I must resign myself. Now, Quiz, what have you to say against Aveline?' said Leonard, folding his arms with an air of resignation, while he felt quite as angry as she did.

But her eyes fell beneath his piercing,

inquiring glance, and she had nothing to say. He was also at a loss for a moment, so he filled up the hiatus by quoting Shakespeare:

'Good name in man or woman, dear my lady,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls.
Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed.'

'Yes. So is backbiting; so is envy; so is jealousy,' he continued, slowly and advisedly. 'We have had one passage-at-arms already on this subject, Quiz. I see that we must have another. In the first, I was hasty, and made a resolution impossible to keep. I am obliged, by circumstances, to rescind that resolution. This is my third *tête-à-tête* with a young lady to-day. To-morrow, I may be forced into another. I do not understand why

you ladies should not allow Aveline to live in peace with an elderly couple who love one another, and would love her, if you all would let them; but this I do understand, that she appears to have no friends amongst you just now. The chevalier dares not stand up for her under the fire of your cross-purposes, so there is no one left but me to take up the glove. And I maintain, tilting face to face with the beautiful Elizabeth Dallimore, that she is as sweet as the spring's first violet, and pure as the winter's first untrodden snow.'

The colour of the 'beautiful Elizabeth Dallimore's' face varied from red to white, from white to red, during this speech. Her whole soul was moved with passion. She had stirred up a family ferment as silly as it was vindictive, in the hope of withdrawing Leonard's friendship from

Aveline and fixing it on herself. She had miserably failed. But she must discover what were his real feelings. He was too self-contained, she thought, for a lover, though the words he had used stung her with the thought that he had never spoken such flattering ones to her. She would sting him in return.

'I suppose this, your paragon, is tacitly engaged to Captain Moore?' she said, sarcastically.

'I suppose so,' he returned, quietly and guardedly, the arrow striking all the same.

He was led to believe this, both from Aveline's saying that she could not go to the manor, and from her hasty rejection of his own hasty proposal.

'It will be a splendid match for her,' exclaimed Quiz, her handsome face flushing with the crimson of joy. 'Now this little *éclaircissement* has taken place, she

will probably remain here till she marries.'

'On that subject, I cannot give an opinion,' he replied. 'Here is the chevalier, who must know best. Good night, Quiz.'

'Stop one minute, Léonard, mon ami,' cried the chevalier, entering breathless. 'My dear woife and the petite are friends once more. This I understand from madame herself, who declares she is ready to die of all the scenes, and the fatigue of the palace. I know no more at present. The child is, I hope, at rest in the *boudoir de ma mère*. She has left her own appartement for our guests, and has improvised a *chambre à coucher* in that sacred spot. May her slumbers be unbroken, for she has been much disturbed.'

'I echo that sentiment,' said Leonard, looking at Quiz. 'Happily, there is One above who is more merciful to His father-

less children than their fellow-creatures often are, and who "giveth His beloved sleep." '

But harassed Aveline had not much sleep that night. Although she was thankful that she was friends with Madame d'Angère, and that the other inmates of the house could not believe the absurd suspicions raised by ridiculous jealousy, still they had been raised, and to a sensitive, truthful nature every suspicion is a thorn. Even if she had not the vague suspicion that her mother was yet alive, and that she must seek her, her all too quick sensibilities prompted her to leave her present home. She could endure hardship, but not suspicion, she thought, forgetting that the Christian soldier must bear reproach as well as bodily chastisement. Thus, tossing about on her couch, walking the room, or gaz-

ing over the forest, she passed the night.

How restful seemed to her that endless roof of trees, with that still vaster roof above it, the starlit sky! How she longed to be safe in that unseen world which she believed to be so much happier than this. But then, her mother! and her friend, Leonard! They might want her. Leonard, she believed, must have been impelled by pity to say those words to her—and she would never hang, like a log, upon the neck of one who had a grand career opening before him, or let it be supposed that she had worked on his compassionate nature. It must be confessed that she was proud while still she seemed so humble. Love! What had she to do with love? A charity-girl, a pauper, as they called her. Not so the chevalier, her father, her protector. On him she could rely, but from him she must part. This

was the burden of her reflections. She must go away—away.

As is not unfrequently the case after a sleepless night, morning brought repose. When she should have been stirring, she slept heavily. Fanchon, who had known the previous day that something was amiss, had not the heart to arouse her, but confided to the chevalier that she feared she was ill. He ordered her to be left undisturbed, and passed the information on to his wife with a sort of grim satisfaction. She, who had already half forgotten her grievances, went to Aveline. Even she, selfish and weak as she was, started back at sight of the disordered couch and the pale, tear-stained face, and with a touch of tenderness, almost maternal, drew over her the silken coverlet, and stooped to kiss the white forehead. Aveline did not awake, but as if, even in sleep, conscious

of the endearment, murmured, 'Mamma, dear mamma,' which caused Madame d'Angère to remain a few minutes at her side, in unusual thoughtfulness.

'It is still her mother she remembers in her dreams,' she reflected. 'Not Alphonse, or me, or Captain Moore, or anyone else. Perhaps we have all been wrong, as my Alphonse declares, and she is as innocent as she looks. Poor dear! I am really fond of her, after all, and I am sure I don't know what I shall do without her. I shall insist on her remaining, and then all this bother will cease. I should never have suspected her but for Lilywhite and Quiz and the rest.'

In this amiable disposition, she returned to the déjeuner. Her change of purpose was visible in her face, and the assembled party almost believed what she said in the fulness of her easily-turned feelings.

'Aveline is tired, and will not come to déjeuner. She will rest, and then all will go on as before. We have misunderstood the poor girl, and I shall persuade her to remain.'

The chevalier gave her an approving glance, but further allusion to Aveline was cut short by the arrival of Captain de Bellefontaine, who came to accompany the party on an expedition to the village of Avon, in the church of which Monaldeschi is buried; and thence to Thomery, where the famous Fontainebleau grapes which supply the Paris markets, trail over every available wall.

Thus Aveline was left alone. When she awoke at last, and before she had time for reflection, Fanchon brought her refreshment and a letter. She could see by the school-boy address that the letter was from Lisle. She hastily open-

ed and read it. It was as follows:—

'DEAREST, DEAR AVELINE,

'Now I am ill in bed at last, and you must come and nurse me. You said you would, so I know you will. Mother won't let me get up, and I don't like bed, but I shouldn't mind if you were here.'

She sprang from the couch in much excitement.

'This is the dear Lord's voice,' she exclaimed. 'I had resolved to leave while they were all absent, now I will await their return. I will go to Lisle. There will be no objection to that. I shall not creep away like a thief in the night.'

She fell on her knees and thanked God for what she believed a divine guidance through her difficulties. Then she dressed herself, went about her avocations as usual,

and waited—waited with such patience as she could command—for the return of the sight-seers. They came at last, and when she heard their cheerful voices in the allée, and saw them about to enter the house, she withdrew to the *boudoir de ma mère*, feeling sad that they should all, apparently, have done so well without her. She had not yet lived long enough to learn how well people manage to get on even when bereft of those who seemed essential either to their comfort, amusement, or happiness. Her heart was very sad, and she felt very lonely when Madame d'Angère entered the room, an open letter in her hand. She sank down, helplessly, on the couch, and began, dejectedly,

'I am tired to death, Aveline, and now, no sooner am I at home, than sister Dallimore writes me this distressing letter. Lisle is very ill, and, if anything happened

to him, I don't know what would become of us all. He is wild to have you to nurse him, and Mrs. Dallimore asks me to spare you while Quiz takes your place with me.'

'I will go at once,' said Aveline.

'And what is to become of me? Quiz is of no use at all; she thinks of nobody but herself. No one considers me.'

'Miss Elizabeth Dallimore will amuse you better than I could when she has you and the chevalier quite to herself. Under any circumstances I must go, for I could not remain here after what has passed, and I also hope to find my mother. I promised Lisle to nurse him when he was really ill, and, now that Mrs. Dallimore has asked me, I can keep my promise.'

'How cruel you are, Aveline. You speak as if you didn't care for us,' cried madame, actually weeping.

There was some truth in this complaint,

for Aveline was roused into a manner unnatural to her. She perceived that she could be used, even by Mrs. Dallimore, to serve personal ends, and cast aside when no longer needed. But she was too sweet-tempered to bear malice even for a moment, and pride melted before the tears of her benefactress. The latter had been incited to jealousy which she did not really feel, and now she was impelled to lose what, at heart, she wished to keep.

'We do not mean you to go, Aveline. It was all a mistake,' she sobbed, with childish effusion.

'I must, dear madame,' replied Aveline. 'I will start to-morrow morning, if the chevalier will help me. I shall then no longer be in the way here, and I shall be of use at Major Dallimore's. You will enjoy the society of your friends, and Captain de Bellefontaine will, as he promised, act

as guide to the neighbourhood. I shall not be wanted.'

'But you will, Aveline. Who will see to the dogs, and curl——' here madame broke down, and Aveline was compelled to console her.

'In the island I may find my dear mamma, but not here,' she said, soothingly. 'Then, perhaps, I may come back again. Will you tell the chevalier while I make my preparations?'

'Cruel, unkind!' said madame, and leaving Aveline she went to explain what was happening to her friends below.

'How can she go? Who is to accompany her?' asked the chevalier, when he had heard his wife's plaint to the end.

'I must be in London this week. I will suit my time to Aveline's,' said Leonard.

'You!' exclaimed Quiz.

'I!' returned Leonard.

'That is as it should be, for you were her first friend,' said the chevalier, taking a pinch of snuff with much satisfaction.

But Quiz was not satisfied. Her haughty face and figure showed pique and chagrin. She rose and swept across the room, Leonard, only, being conscious of her annoyance. He also rose and went to open the door for her.

'Unchaperoned!' was all she said, as she passed out with queenly gait and mocking laugh.

'Oh, Quiz, have you no pity?' were the words that followed her, and that she heard but too distinctly.

Leonard, however, did not hear her muttered speech as she mounted the staircase, and paused on the last step to glance back.

'He can escort her, but not me. A charity-girl, a weak idiot, a mere doll! I

hate her!' was what she half said, half thought, as she hurried to her room, and banged the somewhat rickety door.

CHAPTER VI.

LISLE'S ILLNESS.

'WHEN will she come? How did you ask her? Did you say I would never forgive her if she didn't come?' were the questions of the heir of Lisle while Aveline's fate was under consideration.

'I said I hoped she would come and nurse you, darling, while Quiz is with your auntie,' replied the anxious mother.

'I won't stop in bed if she doesn't come; she will say a story if she doesn't, for she promised, and she always told me that God would punish liars,' said Lisle.

'But you must be patient. She could

not be here to-day, for she and Aunt d'Angère will only get our letter to-day,' soothed Mrs. Dallimore.

'Must I wait all to-night and all to-morrow? I won't!' cried the boy, sitting up in bed.

'Do lie down, darling. It is as much as your life is worth to throw off the clothes and expose yourself. I am quite sure she will be here in a few hours.'

But Lisle would not be tranquillized. Father, mother, nurse, doctor, Helen, all tried in vain. He had been so long accustomed to his own way, that coercion seemed unavailing. Isabella, who was the only member of the family who could frighten him into submission, was at Girton, and he made his mother promise not to recall her. His one cry was 'Aveline,' and he said he would take no medicine till she came to give it him. He was very ill. He had

taken a violent cold, and fever accompanied it; indeed, it was feared that he had caught a fever which had been hanging about the town for some time. But this did not so much alarm the doctors as a certain delicacy of chest and lungs which they discovered. He had been about a week in bed, and this clamour for Aveline had been going on from the first.

The repeated assurances that she would come calmed him a little, but, when the night and day were over, his feverish excitement increased. Mrs. Dallimore counted the hours as anxiously as he, and all her household were as wishful for the possible advent of Aveline, as her sisters had been to get rid of her. But she did not expect, under the most favourable circumstances, that she would arrive before her intention was announced by letter, therefore the early post that might

bring the said letter was expected anxiously. It did not arrive, and poor Mrs. Dallimore looked through her spectacles at her equally disappointed husband in despair.

'It may come by the second post,' said the major.

'She is very ungrateful, and Amicia very unkind not to have written,' returned his wife. 'Now she will not be likely to arrive until the day after to-morrow, and it will be impossible to keep Lisle quiet.'

'She is not compelled to arrive at all,' remarked Helen. 'We were not so remarkably kind to her.'

'What do you mean, Helen? I am sure she was always treated far beyond her position.'

'If you please, ma'am, Master Lisle wants to know if there's a letter,' here interrupted a nurse.

Mrs. Dallimore hurried up to Lisle, who had heard the postman's knock. She told him that the second post would probably bring the letter, and he must try to wait patiently. That was now out of his power, for his brain was heated by fever. But a flood of tears relieved him, and the major appeared with a wonderful new story-book, that distracted his attention for a time.

'Wake me up when the second post comes,' he said to his father, and fell asleep.

'Who is this now, I wonder?' whispered Mrs. Dallimore, looking out of the bed-room window without her spectacles. 'Everybody is so anxious about Lisle that a carriage has arrived already. There were no end of inquiries yesterday. Dear me, it is the omnibus!' she added, putting on her glasses. 'Run down, major, and see what it can be stopping here for.'

The major, who was enjoying the end of the story, obeyed, and crept out of the room like a mouse. He reached the hall in time to see the omnibus drive off, and to hear the words, 'How do you do, Drudge? I am so glad to see you.' A slight figure and a box stood in the centre of the hall.

'Can it be you, Aveline?' he ejaculated.

'Yes, Major Dallimore,' was the cheerful answer, and in his joy he actually kissed her.

He hurried her into the dining-room, called his wife, called Helen, and would have aroused Lisle, but for some sort of narcotic that held his senses chained. This was a welcome, indeed! Aveline turned her bright face from one to the other, and could not answer their questions fast enough. She had travelled a day and a night, twenty-four hours, had come from Fontainebleau to Calais, thence to Dover,

thence by south-coast line to Southampton, whence she had crossed to Cowes by the first boat, and come on by train. Mr. Leonard had seen her into the train at Dover, and proceeded himself to London. Such were Aveline's hasty replies to the rapid questions put by one and another. The anxiety of the family concerning Lisle was so great that little was said of Quiz and the remainder of the Fontainebleau party. That they were well and enjoying themselves sufficed for Mrs. Dallimore's maternal and sisterly heart, and thus Aveline was spared interrogations that she might have felt embarrassing.

'Lisle is asleep now, Aveline,' said Mrs. Dallimore. 'But he has been very impatient because no letter came this morning. We little thought you would be here instead. This is truly kind, and I believe he will now soon get better. Perhaps,

when you have breakfasted, you had better lie down, and we will not tell him of your arrival until you are rested.'

'I am not at all tired, and am quite ready to nurse him at once,' returned Aveline. 'I long to see him.'

'I hope you will quiet him, for we cannot,' said Mrs. Dallimore. 'His one cry has been for you.'

All the servants were in requisition to prepare breakfast for Aveline. The major went hither and thither to hasten it; and she, who had hitherto been waitress, found herself zealously waited upon. She accepted the situation gratefully, forgetting its cause. Indeed, she remembered little else than the farewells at Fontainebleau and the journey with Leonard. The one had been pathetic, the other delightful, and, during the solitary steam over English ground, she had resolved still to do

her duty, and between the sleeping and waking had prayed in the night-watches for direction and support.

Helen took her to Isabella's room, where learned tomes surrounded her, and helped her to unpack and make herself comfortable. This was scarcely completed, when a sudden cry of, 'Aveline! Aveline!' resounded through the passage. In another minute, she was with Lisle. He sprang up in his bed, and threw his arms round her, with the words,

'You dearest, dear Aveline! I knew you would come, for you said you would.'

'Yes, darling; I came as soon as possible after the receipt of your note. I am so glad to see you again.'

'I knew you would, even if I was ever so naughty. But you will make me good; you always did. I'm not a bit improved;

but I have been longing for you ever since you went away.'

'You must lie down now, dear, and let me sit by you,' said Aveline, gently disengaging herself from his embrace, and smoothing his bed.

She was shocked at the change in his appearance. The thin cheeks, flushed with fever, and the unnaturally bright eyes frightened her.

'Yes, make him lie down, Aveline,' whispered Mrs. Dallimore.

There was no longer any difficulty. Aveline had unbounded influence over the wayward, spoilt boy, and he did all she asked him.

'He will soon recover now,' said Dr. Foss.

But he did not soon recover. In spite of Aveline's presence and his ready obedi-

ence to her orders, he grew more and more ill. All the doctors in the island were called in, and every possible expedient resorted to, in order to alleviate the suffering, and save the life, of one on whom so much depended. Aveline was with him night and day, taking rest when she could; for he would not bear her away from him. His parents hung over his every breath, as if their and his eternal salvation depended on it, and everyone watched and nursed by turns. They did not, however, anticipate fatal consequences, though the doctors admitted there was danger. What struck Aveline most, as the days went on, was a sudden change in Lisle himself. He grew less wayward with those about him, and seemed more manly. Hitherto, he had been a young bully of eleven, now he had the manners of a youth of fourteen. This

was, doubtless, partly due to her influence, for he sought to please her just as much as a lover of full age would seek to please his beloved. The old fancy that he should marry her when he grew up increased, and he constantly recurred to it during the first fortnight of her nursing, and while he was apparently getting better.

'I shall soon be twelve, Aveline,' he said one day. 'Then there will only be nine years before I am of age. You won't be older then than Cousin Lucy is now, and she is just married; and wasn't she pretty in her wedding dress! You would be much prettier. As soon as I am twenty-one—and won't it be jolly to be rich?—I shall marry you. You know, you promised to wait for me.'

Aveline did not dare to contradict the boy, as he lay with the hectic of fever on his cheeks, and the wan look of illness in

his eyes. He had, also, some difficulty of breathing, which made it incumbent on his nurses to humour him, for he was excitable, and the doctors feared both heart and lungs.

'I cannot venture to look so far forward,' she replied. 'I always say, "Time enough when the time comes." You know, dear, God orders our life if we trust to Him.'

'I like to do what I choose, and not to have my life ordered for me at all,' he said, irritably.

'Oh! we all like that, Lisle; but we cannot manage it ourselves, do what we will. When we think we are going just where we like, something stops us, and we can no more go on than if we were stocks or stones.'

'You mean my illness, Aveline. I know. I am sorry that I have been such

a naughty boy all my life, and I mean to be good when I get well. Now tell me about Fontainebleau, and the kings and queens who lived there. I wonder why they had such bad ends, like the wicked prince in the fairy tale. They weren't very bad themselves.'

'Perhaps they were too ambitious of the riches and honours of this life, Lisle, and did not think enough of the life to come.'

'Then read me about the beautiful city with the gates of pearl, in the Revelation. That is more beautiful than Fontainebleau: and about Christian in the "Pilgrim's Progress," and all the children. They got to heaven at last, Aveline?'

'The Bible tells us that everyone who "believes on the Lord Jesus Christ" will be admitted there, dear Lisle.'

'You believe it, Aveline, and so will I.

I like to do what you say, because you are so good and pretty, and you were never cross to me, though you always told me how naughty I was.'

'You must ask for faith to believe, dear, not because I say so, but because our dear Lord Himself, says, "He that believeth on Me, I will in no wise cast out."'

Lisle fixed his grave eyes upon Aveline and saw that hers were full of tears.

'Kiss me, dearest, dear Aveline,' he said. 'Say a little prayer for me. Ask that I may get well and be good, and believe as I ought.'

Aveline did as he requested, and, when a moment afterwards Mrs. Dallimore crept into the room from temporary repose, she found the one on her knees, and the other with his thin hands folded in prayer. She could only withdraw again to sob out her own anxieties on her knees. Not that she

had any fear concerning Lisle's recovery. The doctors assured her that with care, and such nursing as he had from all around him, he would eventually get better.

The day after this conversation, Mrs. Dallimore received a letter from Quiz. After discussing Lisle's illness, and giving the history of her own adventures, she proceeded as follows :—

'A strange thing happened yesterday. An Englishwoman came to the château and inquired for Aveline. When she heard that she had left, she asked to see aunt. She was a ladylike person, shabbily dressed, and declined to give her name. Uncle and aunt both went to speak to her, and took her into the salle-à-manger. She said she had known Aveline's mother, and Aveline herself, when she was a child, and much wished to see her. She would

not give any particulars of herself, but said she would return to England, and, in the course of time, seek Aveline in the island. She made many inquiries about her and her mother, and seemed much surprised and perplexed when she heard that the mother had drowned herself. She was quite self-possessed, and expressed much admiration of the kindness shown to Aveline. "Were I her poor mother," she said, "I should go down on my knees to express my gratitude." She did, in effect, fall down, but not on her knees. She went off in a most unsatisfactory fainting fit, and frightened us all to death. Uncle, in his philanthropy, had her taken to Aveline's bed, where she is now in too weak a state to be moved. Anyone who has ever known Aveline has, evidently, a passport to uncle's heart, and aunt's is not invulnerable, so I daresay she may lie there as

long as she likes. She is probably a tramp such as Mrs. Roone was, but we think that you had better not name the circumstance to Aveline at present. I daresay she *is* a good nurse and manages Lisle well, but she is a very mysterious girl, and as deep as the sea. It is lucky that all the guests should have departed together, for Aunt Amicia would have been beside herself with this new entanglement, and uncle is as obstinate as a mule. Only fancy Aunt Conquest in Italy, with Lucy and her Spoon. Forgive the slang, but newly-married people are unendurable. It was very forbearing of them to undertake her and her health, but perhaps they were getting tired of one another's society.

'We are engaged to pay a visit to the Marquis and Marquise de Bellefontaine, old friends of the chevalier's, of whom Aveline has probably spoken. Their son,

the future marquis, is much here, and we ride together, and he acts as my universal cicerone. Aunt Amicia thinks him perfection, and he is, indeed, handsome and agreeable. It would be almost as dull here as in the island but for him. One country town and neighbourhood is much like another, and, save for national virtues or vices as may be, Fontainebleau might be Newport. Of course, customs and manners are different, but one gets used to them. I hope uncle's new guest will not interfere with our De Bellefontaine visit. He is so chivalrous, that he may think it necessary to keep this wandering inquirer until she has recovered.

'P.S.—Since I wrote the above, I have seen her, at aunt's request. She is better, and announces her intention of leaving us as soon as possible. She seems a lady, but will give no account of herself.

'There is mystery and unpleasantness in all connected with Aveline, who would have left this place under all circumstances; so you gave her a lift. I hope Lisle will soon be well, but I suppose it is the old story of jam and tarts!'

This letter tended to divert Mrs. Dallimore's attention. She followed her daughter's advice, and forbore mentioning to Aveline what had happened at Fontainebleau, lest it should make her anxious to return thither, and leave Lisle while the crisis of his illness was yet unpassed. She intended to tell her as soon as he was pronounced out of danger. Her kindness to Aveline was, however, unbounded, and this seemed to please Lisle more than anything. He had an affectionate heart, and showed that his faults were rather due to over-indulgence than to innate wilfulness.

'You love Aveline now, mother, and I

love you. When we are married, she will be your daughter,' he said one day.

'Yes, darling,' replied the mother, with a smile.

'But if I do not get well, and we cannot marry,' he persisted, 'I shall meet her among the angels. She is like one already. Will you always love her, mother?'

'Of course, love. Why do you say such strange things?'

'Because they come into my mind, now I am very, very ill. And poor Aveline has no real mother, as I have, only Aunt Amicia, who is not her own mother. She is an orphan, you know.'

'Yes, darling. She is very sweet and good. Now think of something else—of your pony, and dogs, and——'

'I can't, mother. I only think of Aveline, and the angels, and Jesus Christ, and the pilgrims.'

At this Mrs. Dallimore could not refrain from weeping, and she hurried out in search of Aveline.

'I am afraid you talk too much to him of religion,' she said, sobbing. 'He is very young, and it excites him. Try to divert him with stories. I think he is delirious.'

Major Dallimore, who was with Aveline at the moment, hastened to his boy, and, when he proposed reading him a fairy-tale, was met by the unusual announcement that 'he wanted to say something quite particular.'

'You mustn't speak much, my boy,' returned the major. 'The doctors want you to keep quiet, so that you may get well quickly.'

'Perhaps I shall never get well,' replied Lisle, looking at his father with eyes unnaturally large and bright. 'I am very

sorry that I was such a naughty boy, and I want you to forgive me; you will, father, won't you?'

The simplicity and pathos of this appeal upset the poor major, and it was some time before he could answer.

'I have nothing to forgive,' he said at last, commanding his feelings, and speaking cheerfully. 'You are my best of boys, and, when you get well, we will both grow good together.'

Lisle smiled, and put out his thin hand. His father took it, and, bending over him, kissed him, and, with a 'God bless you,' returned hurriedly to his wife and Aveline, for he could no longer restrain his feelings.

'Go to him, Aveline,' he said. 'You are the only person who knows how to manage him.'

This was true, though the poor child

made wonderful efforts to 'be good,' as he always phrased it. Father, mother, Helen, and all the servants thought only of him from morning to night; but Aveline alone seemed capable of interesting or soothing him. And she was, also, the only one who ventured to be serious with him; the others thought only of amusing him.

She found him in tears.

'Why did papa and mamma cry when they went away so quickly?' he asked. 'They won't cry if I get better, and they oughtn't to cry if I go to Heaven, because I shall then never be naughty again. Are you quite sure that I am forgiven, now that I have repented? I know papa and mamma forgive me, because I have told them that I feel sorry for offending them.'

'They forgive you because they love you, and your Heavenly Father forgives

you for the same reason. That is what the Bible says.'

'And what does it say about believing? Tell me again, Aveline; I have learnt it, but don't quite understand.'

'That God sent His only Son into the world to save sinners, and that all who repent and believe on Him shall have eternal life. It seems almost too good to be true, Lisle.'

'So it does. But I believe it. Say a little prayer, and tell God that I am sorry for my sins, and hope He will forgive me, for Christ's sake. I have told papa and mamma and everybody else that I am sorry, but they all say, "Never mind, only get well."'

So Aveline once more knelt down and offered the prayer that Lisle asked for, and soon after he fell asleep.

CHAPTER VII.

DEATH.

AGAIN the blinds are down at Major Dallimore's. The passers-by tread softly, and look at the house with moist eyes. They speak in whispers one to another of the sorrow within, and make philosophic reflections on the shortness of life, the uncertainty of riches, the instability of sublunary things.

'About ten years ago,' they say, 'he became heir of Worseley Lisle, and now he, too, is dead. A month ill, and gone! I hear that his parents are wild with grief. What will become of the manor now? A strange end to a strange will.'

While passers-by sympathise and speculate, while friends pause on the doorstep, but do not enter the house, while the summer sun strikes on the veiled windows, and the sky is blue and the air is warm, a carriage is seen to pull up at the door. From it descends Isabella Dallimore, who disappears, almost like a ghost, within the quickly-opened door. Too late! The following evening another carriage stops. This time it is Mr. Churchhouse who dismounts, followed by Quiz; they, also, vanish like spectres. If it is so solemn outside, what must it be within? How different from the day when the squire's death was made known! Then all was eager speculation; now all is silent certainty—too certain, too sad for intrusion.

Dead! The child of so many hopes, expectations, anxieties, the pampered boy, the idolized heir, dead! Yes. The temple

of his body lies shattered and cold—its spiritual tenant has fled. Whither? Doubtless to Him who welcomes the penitent; perhaps 'from the evil to come.'

Pass a few days, and a crowd of quiet, tearful spectators surround the house. It is a child's funeral. White plumes and hatbands, and many wreaths of fragrant flowers, symbolise that glorious resurrection which funereal trappings usually veil. Here no testamental document forbids natural grief, but parents, sisters, friends, servants follow the remains of the young heir to the spot where rest the Lisles of Lisle. Slowly and sorrowfully the long, sad procession winds down the High Street, through curtained houses and shuttered shops, to the sound of tolling bells, leaving the house all but untenanted. Such being life, 'why make we such ado?'

The spectators linger about, and talk

and speculate as spectators will. The last act being played, they gossip on what will be the beginning of the new drama.

'I daresay there will be a feast for the lawyers,' they say. 'As the daughter by the first marriage died childless, and the squire had no children by the second, Mrs. Dallimore and her three sisters will come in. They are sure to squabble—women always do. Then who will have the Manor House? Of course it must be sold and the proceeds divided. When the Moores leave, everything will return to the state it was in when the squire died, unless Mr. Moore is clever enough to ferret out a third wife.'

All this, and much more, while the funeral procession travels slowly towards Lisle, while the young heir is laid by the side of the late squire, while the mourners return more briskly, and even more sadly

than they went. Still the passers to and fro linger and comment.

'The blinds are drawn up half way. They will soon be back,' they remark. 'How sad for them to return to the desolate house. Hush! here is the first carriage. Stand aside! Don't let them see you. Poor Mrs. Dallimore! The major almost carries her into the house. And the two eldest daughters look just as melancholy in their crêpe. Here comes the other mourning coach. The gentlemen's carriages have gone home, of course. That is Miss Helen and Aveline Roone, who came all the way from France to nurse him, because he asked for her. She is in deep mourning, too, and looks as sad as any of them. Mr. Churchhouse is with them. He is a good, Christian man, and will comfort them. God help them! It is a terrible blow to their love and pride.'

And so, amid the comments of the lookers-on, unheard by the mourners, the door closes upon the bereaved parents, the sorrowing sisters, and the loving friends. Still the sun shines hotly and brightly; the sky is transparently blue; the birds sing in the surrounding gardens, and the hum of distant voices, and the sound of far-off military music, is heard.

There was mourning also at the manor, the vicarage, and the village of Lisle; if not the deep affliction of near relatives, still the sorrow of friends that one so young, and of whom so much was expected, should have been cut off in his prime. Little work was done that day in and about the place where he, who now lay beneath the churchyard sod, was to have reigned supreme; but people loitered about the old church and new-made grave much as they had done when the old

squire was laid to his rest. Comments and queries echoed as they did then, though different in kind and purport.

The villagers round about the grave, and the tenants of the manor, were, however, all wondering what would now become of the property. 'The heir was dead. Long live the co-heiresses,' might almost have been the burden of their talk.

Of these latter, one was located at the manor. Mr. and Mrs. Moore had placed that ancestral home at the disposal of Madame d'Angère; and she, the chevalier, and a veiled companion had arrived the previous evening. They had left Quiz at Newport, and come on to the manor.

A few hours after the funeral, the chevalier and madame were seated in the old library, receiving consolation from the worthy Moores.

'It was so kind of you to invite us,'

said madame, a belaced handkerchief in one hand, and a scent-bottle in the other. 'We could not allow Quiz to travel alone, and so the chevalier proposed that we should bring her. Poor child! You never saw anyone so bowed down. And no wonder. Such a distressing blow!'

Madame wiped her eyes, and the chevalier took snuff.

'We knew that Mr. and Mrs. Churchhouse would be with the Dallimores,' replied Mr. Moore, 'and thought you would be better attended to here. Besides, I daresay there will be money matters and business to look after; for the poor boy's death will throw everything into confusion. Conquest will stop at the vicarage for a few days, to see after his wife's interest, and you will be here to look after madame's, while the major and Churchhouse are on the spot.'

'I never thought of that,' said the chevalier. 'I should not have come, if I had. But I am glad to be in this country of my exile and adoption once more; for I find my own all changed. And my. dear woife, she loves her native isle.'

'France is delightful, my Alphonse, but I am more accustomed to the island,' sighed madame, smoothing Loulou, asleep upon the new crêpe, and fanning herself.

'I t'ank you much, Mr. Moore, for allowing that strange lady to rest here for a few nights,' said the chevalier. 'As soon as the proprietors will permit, we will arrange that she shall meet Aveline. This is what she desires. She was about to leave the Belle Vue for England when the news of Lisle's death arrived. Hélas, the poor child! How he cough at my snuff! Then we propose that she should

travel with us, and she accept; and you then insist on bringing her here.'

'She seems a quiet person, and you had better let Aveline meet her here, chevalier,' put in Mrs. Moore. 'I am still anxious to have her as a companion.'

The chevalier looked at his wife, who cast down her eyes, but made no remark. The Fontainebleau news had not yet reached Lisle, for the newly-married pairs had not returned to England.

'Aveline knows nothing of this strange lady,' resumed the chevalier. 'We agree with Quiz that she is not to be told until she hear from us; for Aveline is already on the qui vive about a person who was at your weddings, and who she t'ink is her mother risen from the dead. But this person decline to give her name, or to make any confidence.'

In the hurry and distress consequent on

the news of Lisle's death, there had been little time for thought at Fontainebleau. Quiz was overwhelmed with grief and remorse, and refused to be comforted. The intended visit to the Château de Bellefontaine, arranged for that week, had to be put off, and family matters settled at the Belle Vue for the journey and possibly lengthy absence of its proprietors. The stranger guest who was to have left her kind entertainers the day after the intelligence arrived, travelled with them, and proved herself a grateful and useful companion. She had previously been so weak as to be unable to leave her hospitable hosts, and the good chevalier insisted on her remaining at the château until she was better; so that she was enabled to assist madame and Quiz during their rapid and melancholy journey. He had decided on her accompanying them to Lisle, and

with customary bonhomie had asked Mr. Moore to give her a night's lodging, saying that she was anxious to see Aveline, whose mother she had known.

It was, of course, of this person the chevalier spoke, when he said that she would not give her name or history.

'I will manage to bring Aveline here in a day or so, then she can have an interview with her,' said Mrs. Moore. 'It would be a blessing if the poor girl could find her relations, though you are better to her than relatives might be.'

'We must not disturb Sister Dallimore,' said Madame d'Angère. 'I don't think she will ever get over this affliction, and she seems to cling to Aveline.'

Here Mr. Conquest came in, and began to talk of the affairs. He did not mince the matter, but spoke of his wife and her sisters as being now the squire's heirs-at-law.

'We shall have to sell and divide,' he said.

'I would never consent to sell the manor,' sobbed Madame d'Angère, and the chevalier foresaw complications.

Matters remained much in this state for a few days, and those who followed Lisle to his grave on the Friday shut themselves up, as is the custom, until they had appeared at church the following Sunday. After this the outer world once more opened its wide gates to the mourners, and life began to proceed as usual.

On the Monday Mr. Moore's carriage was sent out early, and returned to the manor with Aveline as its sole tenant.

She was met in the hall by Mr. and Mrs. Moore, who received her kindly. She looked very pale, and it was evident that the late events had told upon her. They took her at once to the library,

where she had on a former occasion stayed awhile alone, and where the chevalier and Madame d'Angère were awaiting her. No sooner had she crossed the threshold than she was greeted by such a noise as made everyone start, and turned the current of thought from grave to gay. It was the dogs, who no sooner saw her than they sprang to meet her, barking, yelping, jumping, and displaying every demonstration of canine affection. She stooped over them a moment, then ran towards Madame d'Angère, threw her arms about her, and burst into tears. Mr. and Mrs. Moore wisely left the room, and Aveline was once again alone with her benefactors. Madame forgot herself and could scarcely have received a real daughter more affectionately. She had missed her, needed her, and now was glad to see her again. The chevalier stood

near, tears in his eyes, snuff-box in hand. But he did not venture beyond an English salutation until his wife said, reproachfully,

'How cold you are, Alphonse,' and he then kissed her on both cheeks.

'Oh! I am so glad!' exclaimed Aveline, looking from one to the other, smiles and tears fighting for supremacy. Glad, indeed! for how far different had been the parting. Then a nameless suspicion, a cold formality, clung to her and those who did *not* bid her godspeed; now a personal gratitude, a warm feeling overwhelmed them. Death had been in their midst, and by the mighty conqueror petty jealousies and ignoble pride were trodden down. The girl who had come from far to seek to ward off the scythe of the greedy reaper, and who had tended the sinking flower till it was cut down, was,

for the present, at least, an object of attention to all.

'How pale you look, ma petite!' said the chevalier, and the dear old name brought tears to Aveline's eyes.

'Sit down and tell me about dear Lisle,' said madame, wiping hers. 'I really was not strong enough to go to the funeral, and I hope Sister Dallimore wasn't offended.'

Aveline took a seat close to hers, and the chevalier, with some ceremony, placed himself on the other side, while Frou-Frou jumped upon the girl's lap.

'Frou-Frou looks thin!' she exclaimed.

'He is getting old, and the voyage disagreed with him. In old age we are best at home,' replied the chevalier.

'Young people always seem to die first,' said madame, consolingly.

'Yes, it is strange,' mused Aveline. 'All the love and all the care could not

keep Lisle when God wanted him. He knew he was going, and asked everyone to forgive him whatever he had done amiss. He wished me to give his love to his sisters, and you, and everyone, and to say he was sorry that he had been a naughty boy.'

'He was no more naughty than other boys,' broke in the chevalier, concealing his emotion by a huge pinch of snuff, while madame began to sob.

'He is in heaven now, dear madame, for he repented,' said Aveline, taking her hand, 'and he learnt to love his Saviour before he died.'

At these simple words, madame's sobs redoubled.

'Yes,' she gulped out at intervals, 'Sister Dallimore says—you—you—were the means, I—I—am sorry—we—ever suspected you.'

'Dearest madame, it was all a mistake. Pray do not mention it again,' returned Aveline. 'Mrs. Dallimore says she would like to see you now, and I think it would do her good. Helen comforted her all through, and, when the Miss Dallimores arrived, she and the major both grew calmer. They are more resigned than they were.'

'Ma petite,' broke in the chevalier. 'There is a lady who wishes to see you. A stranger, who says she knew you when you were a child. She was acquainted with your mother also many years ago, and would like to see you.'

'Knew me; knew my dear mamma. There was no one who knew us but Betsey our servant,' exclaimed Aveline, starting up.

'She is not a servant, my child, but has good manners. She came in search for you at Fontainebleau, and, as we were about

to return to the island, we brought her with us.'

'It must be the person in the white veil who spoke to Lilywhite at the weddings; and I believed she was really my dear mamma. But she would have said so, and not have told you she only knew her years ago. What is her name? Where is she?'

'She declines to give her name. She is very reticent,' replied the chevalier in French. 'But she certainly remembers both you and your mother. She was ill at the château, and Fanchon nursed her. Madame was also kind. Quiz visited her when in bed, but could obtain no information from her. She merely said she was desirous to see you, and thankful you had been protected and were still in the island. She was very useful to Quiz on our journey, and sought to console her almost as a mother; for truly Quiz was in despair, and

accused herself as if she had been wrong to leave poor Lisle.'

'May I not see this lady?' asked Aveline, eagerly. 'Can she be my dear mamma?'

'Impossible,' replied the chevalier.

'Yes, impossible,' echoed Aveline, 'for she would have said so, but let me see her —let me ask her how and when she knew us.'

'Follow me, and I will take you to her,' said the chevalier, and he led Aveline from the library, into the hall, and up the wide, oaken staircase.

CHAPTER VIII.

HER DEAR MAMMA.

IN a small and pretty morning-room overlooking the park, sat the stranger to whom the chevalier was about to introduce Aveline. Her eyes were fixed on the door, her hands tightly clasped on her lap. At the sound of feet on the polished oaken floor of the corridor, she half rose, then sat down again. She repeated these movements until the door was opened, and Aveline entered.

'She wishes to be alone with you, mon enfant,' whispered the chevalier, and withdrew, closing the door.

'Bolt it,' said the stranger, and Aveline did so, and stood a moment looking at her.

As she sat with her back to the light, and as the morning sun shone full on Aveline's face, they could scarcely see one another, but the stranger rose impulsively, and ran towards Aveline with outspread arms.

'At last!' she cried, and clasped them round her.

'Mamma, mamma!' shrieked Aveline.

'My child! my Aveline! It is I; it is your mother,' returned the stranger.

Motionless, speechless they stood embraced, mother and child. After eleven long years of separation they met again. Nothing but a low sobbing and a heavy breathing was audible. They clung to one another as if bound together by some invisible band. Aveline was the first to strive to disengage herself from this close

embrace, but her mother only clung to her the more tightly.

'Dear mamma, we are quite safe here,' said Aveline, with re-assuring cheerfulness, much as she had spoken in her childhood.

'Yes, my love; I am not afraid,' replied a calm, sweet voice.

'Are you really my dear mamma?' asked Aveline, withdrawing to examine one who spoke so quietly.

'Yes, Aveline; her who left you almost bereft of reason, but returns sane. They must not know, however, or they will shut me up again.'

A symptomatic terror convinced Aveline. She led her gently to her chair, and, kneeling by her side, tried to recall the face she remembered so well. No sign of insanity was there. The eyes and mouth were tranquil, the brow comparatively

unwrinkled, the white cheeks tolerably smooth; only the hair was silver: Aveline remembered it brown. She saw no trace of the mother she had lost.

Meanwhile that mother was examining her with almost equal incredulity. Was the child she had left, the beautiful girl who knelt at her feet? It seemed impossible.

'Smile, my darling, that I may see if the dimples remain,' she said. 'You cannot be the Aveline I left at the workhouse, when I ran away because I overheard the nurses declare that I was to be sent to the county asylum, and you to the Blue School?'

'I am, I am! and you are my dear mamma,' replied Aveline, the sunshine of happiness restoring the dimples her mother wished to see. 'I knew you were not drowned. I was sure you would come back.'

'Drowned! Oh, no; this wearied body was far away from the water of the Medina. Neither was I mad, only forlorn, terrified, broken-hearted. I knew and understood all that passed, and should have gone raving mad had they shut me up again. I forgot all but self in my terror. I left you, being unmindful of you. I resolved to go to the ends of the earth where they could not find me. Everyone except Betsey thought me out of my mind; yet I was not, for I remembered the past and understood the present. My terror was that, if I told them where I came from, they would write to the workhouse and oblige me to return. Even now I dare not say I am your mother, or reveal my previous history lest they should again confine me.'

'Never again!' exclaimed Aveline. 'We will live together, work together, and I

will be your shield. The time which Mr. Leonard Leigh predicted has arrived, and the work I have done, the lessons I have learnt, the life I have led will enable me to labour for you and to support you, my dear, dear mamma.'

Aveline could restrain her feelings no longer. She leaned her head on her mother's lap and let them have way. It was that mother who had now acquired composure, and who soothed her excited child.

'I do not yet understand,' said Aveline at last. 'Where did you go first when you left the union? Tell me all—all.'

'To hide myself with our poor Betsey at Bristol. But she had married, and was about to leave with her husband for Australia. She had the care of such money as I possessed, and the few valuables I left

behind when we came to the island. I went with her and her husband to Australia. She alone knew my previous history, and what I had gone through, and she was the only person alive who believed me sane—that is to say, she was aware of the terrors that possessed me. But everyone else on board ship thought me out of my mind, and I became conscious that they all said to one another that I should be under restraint, instead of free to rove the world. Betsey's husband agreed with them, and a terrible apprehension seized me that, as soon as we arrived at Melbourne, they would have me confined again. I knew that my mother had relations in Australia, and when we landed I told Betsey and her husband that I was going in search of them, and gave them the slip. I remembered the address of these connections whom I never saw, and

found the locality in Melbourne. They had made their fortune and returned to England. They were then in London. I made no further inquiries, but wandered about from place to place, tormented by the fear of capture. No escaped criminal ever dreaded prison more than I did the asylum. You remember how your father had me shut up, and how Betsey procured my release. And I was never mad, only a prey to melancholy. All this time my recollection of you, my darling, was transient, for I was wrapped up in self. When I did think of you, it was with a happy conviction that you were better without me, training in the Blue School.

'Fortunately, all my money was sewn into my dress, and I had sense enough to eke it out. But it was finished at last, and I knew not where to lie my head. God put a Christian lady in my path, who,

seeing me, took compassion on me. She was engaged in philanthropic work, and understood my condition. She took me, first to her own home, and then persuaded me to go with her to what she called a boarding-house. This was really a sort of sanatorium, maintained by Christian people for such as I. At first I refused to remain, and was about to run away, chased by my usual fear, when a kind doctor assured me that, if I would stay, the lady would pay for me, and he would cure me. He convinced me that there was no coercion, and I remained.

'I soon got so much better under gentle treatment that I was able to make myself of use. By degrees I recovered a more natural tone, and thought of you, my love. Still I dreaded to write and inquire, uncertainty seeming better than certainty. I had no confidant, therefore no adviser.

I soon earned my own living as nurse in the institution, but I was still carefully watched as patient. To this I submitted, feeling secure. At last the clouds dispersed from my brain, and I recovered. Then came an earnest longing for my child. I could no longer rest away from you, my darling. I confided in my best of friends, Mrs. Malcolm, and asked her to lend me money to pay my passage back to England. I promised to return to Australia with you, my Aveline, and to resume my occupation as nurse. I feel sure that you will also find employment, and be more independent there than in your present position. But we will talk of that another time.'

'Go to Australia, dear mamma!' echoed Aveline.

'Yes. I am safe there,' was the reply, and Aveline feared lest the return to the

island might bring back the disease.

'You are also quite safe here, dear mamma,' she said. 'But, before we speak more of Australia, I hope you will let me tell the chevalier and madame who you really are. They have been, oh! so good to me.'

'And to me, Aveline. But tell me first exactly who they are.'

Aveline complied with her mother's request, and gave the history of her benefactors.

'Madame d'Angère, a niece of the Squire Lisle who once lived here, and aunt of the boy he made his heir?' commented Mrs. Roone, thoughtfully.

'Yes, dear mamma; and I have lived with her almost ever since you left me. What brought you to the island?'

This sudden question seemed to confuse Mrs. Roone, and Aveline did not pursue

the subject. She replied to her inquiries concerning Madame d'Angère and her sisters instead, and was rejoiced to find how clear and intelligent they were. Indeed, she could not doubt the fact of her mother's restoration, save in the one point of her fear of recognition. It was evident that she was bent on returning to Australia, and poor Aveline asked herself if she must bid adieu to all she loved in England, and seek a home in another continent. She was prepared for any change, however, now she had found her mother.

The hours passed, and they were still conversing. They knew neither time nor place. They were reunited, and they forgot all outward things.

At last there was a knock at the door, and madame's voice was heard, inquiring if anything was the matter.

'I must tell her, dear mamma,' said Aveline, rising, and standing before her mother. 'If we go to Australia, there can be no need of concealment.'

'You are sure?'

'Quite.'

Awaiting no further permission, Aveline opened the door, and Madame d'Augère entered, followed by the chevalier. They had been alarmed by the length of the interview, and could no longer resist the temptation to see what was going on.

'She is—she is—my own mamma,' was all Aveline could say.

Mrs. Roone rose to meet her child's benefactors. Her movements were graceful, her face refined. The white hair betokened age, but the features were comparatively young. She had on the dark dress and the simple cap she had worn

as nurse, yet her appearance was that of a lady. The box that had accompanied her to Fontainebleau, and thence to England, contained the remainder of her wardrobe, which was mainly similar to what she wore.

'I thank and bless you from the bottom of my heart for your kindness to my daughter,' she said, with faltering voice.

'Your daughter! Our Aveline! The child of our adoption!' exclaimed the chevalier.

'I thought you were drowned, but Aveline always said you were not,' cried madame. 'I am very glad to see you; but you will leave Aveline with us all the same; for I cannot possibly do without her. Since I have been here, Lily-white has waited on me, and she is unlike you, Aveline. But then, to be sure, we have brought you up.'

Various explanations followed, which were only a repetition of the preceding. The chevalier took unintermitted pinches of snuff, not knowing whether to laugh or cry, while madame suddenly disappeared, and returned with Mr. and Mrs. Moore. All concealment, had it been expedient, was henceforth impossible; for Mr. Moore was sure to publish the news right and left. He shook hands warmly with Mrs. Roone, assuring her that Aveline was as good as she was pretty, then said he was sorry to disturb so happy a re-union, but the carriage had been waiting half an hour.

'It is for me!' cried Aveline in terror. 'What will Mrs. Dallimore think of me?'

'And I have settled to go back with you. I am ready, you see,' added madame.

'Dear mamma, I must go! but I will re-

turn,' said Aveline, clinging to her mother.

Their friends glanced from them to one another, touched by the affecting sight. The fresh young girl, in her mourning dress, and the pale, white-haired woman.

'You shall come back with Madame d'Angère and be with your mother to-night,' said Mr. Moore. 'When the Dallimores know that you have found her, they will have no objection. Indeed, they can't want you with three daughters of their own, and, I daresay, will be glad to get rid of you.'

'Perhaps so,' returned Aveline. 'But I have found some one who will never want to be rid of me.'

The unintentional reproach went home. Madame d'Angère said, peevishly,

'I'm sure, Aveline, we missed you very much, and don't intend to let you go away again.'

'Go at once, my love,' whispered Mrs. Roone, surprised at this by-play.

Aveline, in an ecstacy of happiness, followed madame and Mr. Moore to the carriage, leaving Mrs. Moore behind. But no sooner were she and madame alone in the carriage, than she burst into tears. She had put a strong restraint on her feelings during the past weeks for the sake of Lisle and his parents, but the sudden happiness atop of the ill-suppressed grief had been too powerful for the barrier, and it broke down. Half hidden in one corner of the carriage, her hands covering her face, she sobbed violently. Madame d'Angère was frightened. She thought more of herself than Aveline, and wondered how she could possibly meet her sister, if Aveline was in tears.

'Take my salts, Aveline. Pray be calm. You ought to be happy. One would think

you were sorry to see your mother again,' she said, touching the excited girl lightly with one finger.

'A moment, dear madame. I shall be well in a moment. It was so sudden, so strange,' replied Aveline, in a broken voice.

Madame, who never moved an inch without her fan and scent-bottle, began to use the former elegantly, moving it to and fro between herself and Aveline. It was her panacea, and she never considered whether the flutter, the wind, and the movement annoyed a neighbour or not. She did not pause at church to ask whether she distracted the attention of parson or people; or in drawing-room, whether she interrupted conversation; but she used the instrument dangling at her side under all circumstances: now opening it, now closing it, now swaying it with that half-imperceptible motion so annoying to a nervous per-

son. Although by no means nervous, it irritated Aveline. She laid her hand on the fan to stay the motion with a 'De grâce, dear madame,' and her benefactress was offended.

'Well, Aveline, you might be more polite,' she said, closing the fan.

'Dear madame, I am so happy, so—so excited that I know not what to do,' said Aveline, rousing herself. 'But I am selfish, and we should be thinking of Mrs. Dallimore.'

'Of course we should; poor sister Dallimore,' returned madame, mollified, and in her turn putting her handkerchief to her eyes, and scent-bottle to her nose. 'What must I say when I meet her? Must I condole with her about the dear boy, or talk of indifferent subjects?'

'I think you may be quite natural, dear madame,' replied Aveline.

'Uncle Lisle and my sisters always said I was too natural, Aveline, and I never knew how to please them. It was indifferent to me when I married, but under these sad circumstances I should wish to try.'

Accordingly, madame composed her features, arranged her dress, held her lace handkerchief conveniently, and comported herself as she thought would best become one bereaved relative about to condole with another. But she could not so smoothe her mind; therefore she suggested that Aveline should dry her eyes, and that they should be silent during the remainder of the drive. Aveline acceded to this proposition thankfully, and secured a short space to think of 'her dear mamma.'

CHAPTER IX.

MY LORD'S SECRETARY.

'NOTHING like a good chancery-suit to cure grief,' said Mr. Conquest, senior, to Leonard, some time after Lisle's funeral. 'It must end in that. The major is as obstinate as a pig. He declares that he is his son's heir, and that, consequently, the manor must come to him and his children, intact. It is certainly not entailed, neither did the squire mention any heir after the boy; but, in equity, it belongs to the four nieces, and I, as the husband of one, mean to stand out for my wife's portion. I have persuaded

the chevalier to remain in England for a settlement, and he and Amicia are to continue at the manor whether the Moores leave or not. As to Churchhouse, he objects to law, and says he would rather that his coat should follow his cloak. The ladies are much excited, and even Mrs. Dallimore has been roused into interest. But a family feud is an awful bore.'

'Is not the major really the heir?' asked Leonard.

'Doubtful. There are points in marriage settlements and old deeds which lead me to believe the property must go in the direct line, if no will is made. It must be thrown into chancery,' replied the barrister.

'If the second Mrs. Lisle, Miss Cunninghame that was, had left a child, of course he or she would have inherited under all circumstances,' remarked Leonard.

'Certainly; but, such not being the case,

we must fight it out. The major is a cantankerous old fellow, and won't see that there are two sides to the question.'

'He is poor and has a family,' put in Leonard.

'So is Churchhouse—so shall I be, perhaps, when I give up business—so is the chevalier, in spite of his French château.'

'You seem all of you very well off, sir, and perhaps a direct heir may turn up. More wonderful things have happened.'

'In your novels, Leonard. After all, they are not to be despised, and the vicar and I were wrong to disparage your literary gifts. You have shown pluck, and are a very lucky fellow. You hit the right nail on the head when you wrote those semi-political articles, and that slashing novel. People are not yet tired of asking "Who's who?" Yet you say you

have made nothing by it. The publisher ought to be hanged.'

'I am quite satisfied, for it has procured for me an introduction to Lord Mountford, and the offer of a temporary secretaryship to his lordship, and perhaps a permanent one.'

Mr. Conquest almost jumped up from his chair in his surprise. He had always believed in law but not in literature, and here was his brother's clerk, who had been too poor to be articled, but who yet had worked like a slave, suddenly made private secretary to a man of mark, because he had managed to secure the ear of the public, and to fall in with the times and government.

'How did you set about it? What patronage had you?' he asked.

'I made no effort, sir, I had no patronage.'

'Then there is something in luck.'

'There is more in Providence.'

'You are quite right, Leonard, and your trust has not been ill-placed. You are a worthy nephew of a worthy uncle; but you have your reward in this world, his is yet to come. Tell me how it came about.'

'I merely received a note asking me to call at Lord Mountford's house in Piccadilly. I went and had an interview with his lordship. He told me he had read my book, and previous and subsequent papers, and wanted to ask my views on forthcoming events. I replied that I had formed none, and I feared that what I had written in haste had gained me more credit for discrimination than I deserved. However, he pumped me nearly dry, apologised for the liberty he had taken in sending for me, and dismissed me. I thought it was

cool, but then he was a cabinet minister! I have since found that inquiries were made about me here, at the office, and Mr. Charles kindly gave me a good character, without knowing that my destiny might hang upon it.'

'And that he might lose a valuable clerk,' broke in Mr. Conquest.

'Then came a note of inquiry to ask if I would like a secretaryship, to which I modestly replied "certainly;" thinking that my fairy-godmother was at work. Afterwards another summons, and I was told that Lord Mountford's secretary was likely to resign on account of his health, would the post suit me if he did so? Of course I said, "Yes," and in a few weeks I am to begin work, if you will dispense with my services.'

'My dear fellow, let me congratulate you!' cried Mr. Conquest, holding out his hand.

'Yes, isn't he a lucky fellow,' interrupted Mr. Charles, coming in at the moment, for the foregoing conversation took place in Chancery Lane. 'You have been so taken up with the manor that you have heard nothing about it.'

'I have only, as yet, mentioned it to you and one other person, Mr. Charles,' said Leonard, remembering Aveline. 'It was only finally settled yesterday, and I did not like to speak much about it till I was sure. Even now it may be only provisional.'

'You will not overlook Craig's Court much longer, I take it, or require the oversight yourself of the invaluable Pluckrose,' laughed Mr. Conquest.

'That is my greatest grief,' returned Leonard. 'But for the inspiration of the Temple, the tree, and the sparrow's nest, I should never have written that book.

Besides, I believe the old davenport had something to do with it. I always feel as if the squire were urging me on when seated at it.'

'That is why your *nom de plume* is Davenport?'

'Yes. It came to me "promiscous," as Pluckrose says; and has, probably, been more serviceable than Leigh.'

All the time that Leonard had been talking, he was seated at his desk, pen in hand. He had not thrown up his clerkship because sudden fame had twined a perishable olive wreath round his brow, but had, on the contrary, worked more sedulously than ever. He had learnt the admirable but difficult art of waiting, and, having no other dependance than his own exertions, he felt it a duty to keep the bread and cheese he held in hand, instead of straining after imaginary turtle soup. Ac-

cordingly, this dainty fell into his mouth without the asking. He was about to be transported from poverty to affluence, and he found it difficult to realize the position. But no one who saw him could doubt that he was better suited to his future than his present life.

That evening he was engaged in completing an article for a leading magazine, when he had a visit from Mr. Moore. That gentleman had much to talk about, so Leonard resigned himself to the necessity of setting aside his papers, and listening; for Mr. Moore was garrulous, and liked to have the conversation his own way.

'I have run up to town on purpose to have a chat with you over the Lisle business,' he began. 'The whole island is astir about this probable law-suit, and I daresay Conquest will push it on, both

in his own and his wife's interest. That old Worseley Lisle, Esquire, ought to have been tarred and feathered for leaving so iniquitous a will, after having sacrificed my poor sister. I am convinced that the Eva she mentions in those two letters was, and perhaps still is, their child. If we could find her, we should soon overturn the schemes of the lawyer, and the avarice of the soldier, and save that old place from being either swallowed up or sold. We found out the marriage through my poor sister's disjointed, appealing letters. Why shouldn't we try to discover this Eva that she writes about? Let us have another look at 'em.'

Leonard unlocked one of the drawers of the old davenport, and took out a small packet, tied with pink tape, and labelled No. 3. It consisted of two letters, yellow with age, and worn with friction.

'I think I know them almost by heart,' he said, while Mr. Moore untied them, put on his *pinces-nez*, and looked them through. 'Mrs. Lisle entreats forgiveness for Eva, who has, seemingly, incurred the squire's displeasure by marrying contrary to his wishes. This is exactly what his daughter by his first wife did, and what his favourite niece, Madame d'Angère, also did. The writer—your sister, I mean—is very careful in all her letters to give no surnames. She signs herself simply M. L.'

'Yes; Marian Lisle. That's clear enough now; and I believe Eva was her daughter,' said Mr. Moore, looking up from his letters, and over his glasses, at Leonard, who was seated with his elbow on the davenport.

'So do I. But she is, probably, dead, as there is no mention of her in the succeeding and last letter,' said Leonard.

'That was written but a short time before Marian returned to Lisle to die,' replied Mr. Moore, bitterly. 'Perhaps she went to insist on an acknowledgment of her marriage, and to declare it herself, as well as to beg forgiveness for Eva. Oh! if we could only find Eva. She would be thirty or forty years old, from the date of these letters, supposing she was married.'

'We can only assume that,' put in Leonard. 'The squire either destroyed the letters concerning the offence, or was with his wife when it occurred. There is no case to go upon.'

'We might advertise for heirs of Lisle of Lisle.'

'Your sister might not have assumed that name, and there are no letters to refer to. It is, at best, very one-sided.'

'I should say all the world was one-

sided, if I didn't know it was round, having more than once circumnavigated it. At any rate, old Lisle had only one side to his character, and that was pride.'

'He was a strange mixture of pride, reserve, sensitiveness, and, I must add, tyranny. But he is dead; let him sleep in peace, Mr. Moore.'

'Impossible, Mr. Leonard Leigh. I shouldn't at all wonder if he wasn't in the room at this very minute directing us how to make wrong right. The spiritualists say that ghosts inhabit our furniture, and he probably lives in the davenport until we have wound up his earthly affairs. Don't you feel pins and needles running through you when you sit at it?'

'No; it has rather a calming effect on my nerves. It inspires me, and I feel as if I could not write well on any other desk. I shall remove it to my new quarters.'

'You will run down and see us all before you begin your secretaryship. We have settled to stay on for a time, and the chevalier and madame remain with us till after Christmas at least. Things have shaped themselves, for they are quite content with Aveline to fidget over them, while my wife has engaged her mother, Mrs. Roone, as nurse to herself. She has been ailing ever since the weddings, and is now laid up. She misses the boys. The eldest can't come to us till Christmas—the second is settling in his profession—the third in a country curacy—the——'

'What do you mean by Mrs. Roone, Aveline's mother?' interrupted Leonard, who had not heard of the discovery of this lost parent.

Mr. Moore gave a brief sketch of the return of Mrs. Roone from Fontainebleau with the chevalier, and of the subsequent

éclaircissement. Leonard listened in mute astonishment.

'And she is not mad?' he asked, when he had heard to the end.

'No more than I am,' replied Mr. Moore. 'She is so sane that she manages my wife already, and will soon set her up again. You see, she is a regularly trained nurse, and says she had most difficult cases in Australia. But her stay with us is temporary, because it seems she has promised to go back to Australia, and intends to take Aveline with her. I don't know what the chevalier and madame will do without that nice girl.'

'Aveline going to Australia!' cried Leonard, off his guard for a moment.

'Her mother says there is scope for them both there; but I fancy she has a kind of fear that she may be again put in an asylum if she remains in the island.'

'Never, so long as I am alive,' cried Leonard.

'Besides,' continued Mr. Moore, not heeding Leonard's words, but bent on his own discourse, 'she and Aveline would begin a new life in the colonies, and could not have the slur cast upon them that they had been paupers ; which is what the good ladies of the island are pleased to call them. Aveline would be sure to make a good match, and probably Mrs. Roone might marry again, for she is young enough and would be good-looking if she wasn't so pale. But that doesn't matter now-a-days when all the women, young and old, rouge, so they tell me.'

'Not Aveline—or—her mother, I am sure,' broke in Leonard. 'I should despise them if they did. I could not speak a second time to any girl if I thought she was rouged and powdered, and one can-

not be deceived in those who do it.'

'So said my dentist the other day,' laughed Mr. Moore. "They can't hide it from us," said he. "It comes off on our fingers when we're stopping their teeth, and we know the made-up ones by their complexion—it gets coarse, and, when looking into the mouth, we see the little pits, like pin-holes, in the skin." But they didn't do it in Australia when I was there, having natural roses enough; and perhaps Mrs. Roone may recover hers, who knows?'

'When does she propose returning to Australia?' asked Leonard, thoughtfully.

'When I take my wife to America, and the chevalier carries off madame to Fontainebleau. She has promised to remain until then, and that will depend on circumstances. My lease of the manor has expired, as you know, and there is nothing particular to retain us in England at pre-

sent. Of course, we shall return when we've taken a run to America, and then I reckon upon going to Holland and a few European countries, where I have never been.'

'Lucky man!' sighed Leonard. 'I have never even seen an Alp.'

'Come with us to America, and I'll show you Chimborazo. But secretaries must go where they're bid, and that would never have suited me.'

While Mr. Moore rattled on, as was his wont, Leonard mused over what he had told him of Aveline and her mother, and their possible exile to another continent. He scarcely believed they would leave England, and his thoughts went at once to Aveline's natural refusal to go to the manor when last it was proposed to her; but now she was there in spite of circumstances, or, rather, led by circumstances,

and he foresaw, what she must have foreseen, complications, if she met Captain Moore under his parents' roof, which might result in matrimony. He never for a moment misdoubted her simplicity and purity of intention, but he wished she had been anywhere else. He did not understand her. He loved her, but had she returned his affection, he thought, she would surely have shared his poverty as he would now gladly share his prospective comparative affluence with her. It must be that she loved Captain Moore. He was too high-souled to be jealous, but the thought was bitter, and took off the fresh flavour of his pleasure in his sudden prosperity. Would Captain Moore pursue his suit when he found her and her mother in situations almost servile in his father's house?

'You are not listening, Leigh,' suddenly

exclaimed Mr. Moore. 'I always reckoned you a good listener, but no young man pays attention now-a-days to the yarns of his elders. I can't bear to think of that poor child's being in poverty, while the manor's going to the dogs in a chancery-suit.'

'What poor child, sir?' asked Leonard, thinking still of Aveline.

'Eva, to be sure. I'm resolving to look up the registers again to see if there is no Eva Lisle christened in Bristol. It would be something to do till we cross the Atlantic in the spring.'

'But, if she afterwards married, she would have changed her name, and we should be no nearer than before.'

'You are too sharp by half, Leigh. Lord Mountford will have a fellow who sleeps with one eye open, like the Bristolians, to look after his interests. And you can no

longer help me, and I can't employ Charley Conquest again, for he is not likely to discover an heiress who shall do his brother out of a fourth part of the manor, so I must set to work on my own hook.'

'I will keep the other eye open on Eva, your, and the squire's account,' laughed Leonard; 'for, if still alive, she is assuredly heiress of Lisle Manor.'

'I am positive I heard the old davenport creak as you spoke,' returned Mr. Moore, who was superstitious.

'It does nothing but creak. Hinges, castors, locks, are all rusty,' laughed Leonard.

He, nevertheless, sat on at it, long after Mr. Moore's departure, and succeeded in finishing his article. Then, as he was about to close it, his eye fell upon the squire's injunctions on the lid, and he felt they were only half fulfilled. As Mr.

Moore suggested, this Eva, this daughter might still be living, and for the hundredth time he read over those two yellow letters written by the squire's wife, and containing an eloquent appeal for his forgiveness of this same Eva for her 'inconsiderate and imprudent marriage.'

It was all very complicated, and he tried to banish it from his mind. This was not difficult, because the living Aveline and her mother, and their affairs were ready to replace the musty parchments of the dead squire, and he soon found himself thinking somewhat unkindly of this, his so-called sister.

CHAPTER X.

BESIDE THREE GRAVES.

IT was as Mr. Moore said; Aveline and her mother were located for a time at the manor. The one had been desirous of taking a small lodging and setting bravely to work, the other of returning to Australia; but the plans of both had been overruled by the kind people who surrounded them. The gentlemen, both at manor and vicarage, protested against the Australian project; the ladies found immediate occupation for them. No sooner did Madame d'Angère think she should lose Aveline for ever, than she found she could not do without

her; and the fact that there was, actually, a trained nurse in the house, compelled Mrs. Moore to get worse directly, not to lose so good an opportunity. Thus, need on one side, and gratitude on the other, kept mother and child at the manor.

At Aveline's earnest request, they spent all their spare time together, and the small morning-room already mentioned was appropriated to them. While the law proceedings connected with the manor were pending, the chevalier and Mr. Moore agreed to remain there, sharing space and expenses. The former did so particularly on his wife's account, who had recovered her natural tone since she had been in her own country; the latter, because he had made up his mind to discover an unknown niece now that there was no hindrance to her succeeding to her inheritance. These arrangements were naturally only tempor-

ary, but they answered well, Aveline being the only person harassed by them. She was, as they say, torn to pieces between her natural and her adopted parents; for Madame d'Angère now took it into her head to be jealous, not of the chevalier, but of Mrs. Roone. Besides, there was Lilywhite, more jealous still, and always ready to run a thorn into Aveline's side whenever she could. However, Aveline had recovered her beloved mother, and cared little for these annoyances. That Mrs. Roone was restored, everyone acknowledged; but Aveline discovered a reticence and dread which sometimes alarmed her. She had not lost the terror of the asylum; she seemed afraid of replying to a question, even when put by her child.

One day they were left quite alone, the ladies having gone for a drive together, the gentlemen being also away.

'Dear mamma,' said Aveline, 'would you mind telling me what brought you here when first we left Bristol?'

'I was afraid of being retaken, and I wanted to cross the sea somewhere,' replied her mother, evasively.

'But you seemed to know of this place, dear mamma.'

'I had heard of it when I was young, and I suppose that made me wish to see it. It was a melancholy visit for us. First the funeral, then the Union. I should like to visit that grave quietly with you, now we are alone, Aveline.'

'I can never understand why I was called by that name,' said Aveline, inquiringly. 'I found it in an old history of the island, strangely connected with Amicia, which is Madame d'Angère's christian name. Amicia and Aveline were daughters of the Lady of the Wight, Isabella de Fortibus.'

'A singular coincidence,' returned Mrs. Roone. 'But will you take me to that grave? I will go at once and put on my bonnet.'

She went, and Aveline, fearing the effect, followed.

They were soon in the churchyard.

'How very sweet and peaceful,' said Mrs. Roone. 'How different from the funeral. And how changed we are, dear child. I am "clothed and in my right mind;" you are again my stay, always my hope and support. How could I have left you?'

'Dearest mamma, forget the past, think only of the present. We will never part again.'

'So said I, once, my darling. Which of these is—the grave of Mr. Lisle.'

Aveline pointed to one of the two turfy mounds, beautifully kept by the old sex-

ton, at the head and foot of which cypress-trees grew. Near them was the smaller grave of the young heir; but that was marked by a white marble cross.

'Why is there neither monument nor inscription?' inquired Mrs. Roone.

'Mr. Lisle so willed it.'

'And that other grave, so like Mr. Lisle's; whose is that?'

'It is the grave of his second wife.'

As Aveline said these words, she was leaning on the cross that marked her friend's resting-place, and looking at her mother. She was alarmed to see that mother suddenly sink down on the squire's grave, and cover her face with her hands.

'You should not have come, dear mamma,' she said, going to her.

'It was only a momentary terror—it will pass off,' replied Mrs. Roone, shudder-

ing and turning away her head. 'Tell me why Mr. Lisle was buried near his second wife.'

Aveline briefly related what she had heard of the history; but, before she reached the point where Mr. Moore's share in it occurred, she was startled by hearing her name mentioned by a well-known voice. Turning, she was met by Leonard Leigh.

'This is my dear mamma,' she said, advancing towards him, with extended hands and flushed face. 'Mamma, this is Mr. Leonard, who was so good to us when we first came here,' she added, turning to her mother, while Leonard still held her hands.

Mrs. Roone rose slowly. Her face was, if possible, paler than usual, and looked, with its bands of silver hair, almost ghost-like. But a charming smile of recogni-

tion instantly illuminated the features, and, to Aveline's unspeakable joy, she met Leonard as a well-remembered friend.

'I have not forgotten you or your kindness,' she said, 'though you and Aveline are both strangely altered. She tells me you are to her as a brother.'

Leonard looked from the glowing face of the daughter to the colourless mother, and recalled the scenes of years gone by, when he met them first. Mrs. Roone was no longer the terrified maniac, but the quiet lady, and he recollected the doctor's opinion, that she was not actually out of her mind. He was much moved, and expressed, with nervous rapidity, his pleasure at seeing her again. The meeting was embarrassing on all sides, and a momentary silence succeeded. It was broken by Aveline.

'This is poor Lisle's grave,' she said,

laying her hand on the marble cross.

'It is all very sad,' he returned, standing by her side and looking down upon the turfy mound, round about which choice flowers were already planted.

'I believe he is quite happy. He sent much love to you,' she replied, simply, tears in her eyes.

'Poor boy! perhaps it is best as it is,' he said, brushing a drop from his own eyelid.

'Of that we may be quite sure,' said Mrs. Roone, emphatically.

Then Leonard told them that he had arrived late the previous night, having to run down to see his uncle before entering upon his new life.

'I also wished to see you both once more together,' he added, his eyes resting on Aveline's beautiful face. 'You have gone through much, Aveline, since our hurried journey from Fontainebleau.

You have spent a life in a few months.'

'Yes,' she replied, meeting his earnest gaze. 'But I am very happy now. Perhaps, dear mamma, we had better return to the house.'

Mrs. Roone assented, and they walked through the shrubbery, Leonard accompanying them. Just as they reached the door the carriage arrived, and, in addition to Madame d'Angère and Mrs. Moore, they perceived that Quiz was in it. Of course they all waited until the ladies got out, and Leonard was warmly welcomed by them. He explained his unexpected appearance, and they all went together into the hall. Here Quiz kissed Aveline, and asked to be introduced to her mother. Leonard watched them narrowly. Quiz, who looked pale and sorrowful, still met Mrs. Roone condescendingly, while Mrs. Roone's manner, if nervous, was easy. She was evidently a

lady. So thought Quiz in spite of a secret desire to find her otherwise.

It may be said here, that the intercourse bred of affliction had softened the heart of Quiz towards her she looked upon as a rival; but at the sight of Leonard once more in attendance, the hardening process at once began again. Poor Quiz! she had given her heart unasked, and could not readily get it back. Leonard, too, had found no return for his, and, as is usual in love matters, it seemed a game of cross questions and crooked answers. Besides, all three knew of Captain Moore's proposal and its expected renewal, and who shall describe the varied hopes and fears of their young hearts concerning the stirring question of mutual affection? Happily for Aveline, her mother absorbed her thoughts, and she struggled bravely against other than filial love.

To Leonard's disappointment, Aveline and her mother went upstairs when the rest of the party went into the library. Immediately afterwards the gentlemen came in, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Churchhouse, and they all began a warm discussion about the chancery suit. Leonard, perceiving that this distressed Quiz, inquired of her concerning her mother and sisters, and could but perceive that her brother's death had not been without effect upon her. She looked paler than usual, and the softening wand of sorrow had transmuted the haughty maiden into the interesting mourner. Leonard, who prided himself on being a reader of character, was struck by the change, and his old playmate and correspondent resumed her original position in his estimation. Now and again, however, the old leaven swelled over the brim of restraint.

'Mother must rouse herself,' she said. 'Of course it is difficult to accustom oneself to the loss, both of poor Lisle and the income, though everyone thinks the property must revert to us. How fortunate you have been, Leonard! I wish I could write a book.'

'Yes, Quiz. It was quite unexpected. I fancy most of our blessings are. Did you see much of France?'

'Yes. We made expeditions every day. Le Marquis de Bellefontaine came to see the chevalier, and we all went to his ancient château, and spent some days there.'

'And the preux capitaine?' asked Leonard.

'Oh! he was always with us,' replied Quiz, carelessly.

'Is it to be la belle marquise, Quiz?'

This question received for reply a glance so piercing and so indignant, that Leonard thought to himself, 'It is Quiz after all.'

He had ample time to reflect on this, for she had come to spend a week at the vicarage, change being considered necessary for her. Indeed, she was far from strong. Their conversation was interrupted by the chevalier.

'What think you of this chancery, Léonard, mon ami?' he asked. 'Mr. Conquest, he is hurry it on, and your papa, Quiz, he will come to no arrangement.'

'I do not see why he should, chevalier,' she replied.

'Do you know what has become of la petite?' he whispered to Leonard. 'Since that unfortunate affair at Fontainebleau, she avoids me. And, ma foi, there is no reason! Madame ma femme has no longer her suspicions.'

'I think she went upstairs with her mother,' replied Leonard, and the chevalier left the room.

Quiz uplifted her black eyebrows slightly, and said,

'It is a pity that old men should be so foolish.'

Leonard was inclined to think so also, but made no answering remark. Shortly after, he and Quiz left the manor with their uncle and aunt for the vicarage. He had a long talk with his uncle who was always sympathetic and affectionate. There was much to say, first, of his own prospects, secondly, of his cousins in their new spheres, thirdly, of Aveline and her mother, and lastly of the chancery suit, of which the vicar disapproved.

'Dallimore is the boy's heir,' said the vicar. 'Why not let him have the place. Lawyers can always find a counter reason. I am glad you have given up the law, Leonard. If they hadn't pampered that poor child so, he might have been alive now.

You were best off, after all, with the old davenport and a will to work. The squire tried to disappoint us all, and a pretty mess he has made of it.'

While they were discoursing thus, Aveline was engaged with her mother. No sooner was Mrs. Roone alone with her child, than she gave way to uncontrollable weeping. Poor Aveline could only imagine that the churchyard and the sudden appearance of Leonard had recalled the past too vividly, and caused the long-restrained feelings to pour forth. But what if worse should follow? While she was striving to calm her, the chevalier appeared. He was prepared with a reproach concerning their absenting themselves, but, seeing their distress, withheld it.

'Who has been tormenting you now, mon enfant?' he said, instead.

The strange voice instantly stayed Mrs.

Roone's agitation. With an effort that Aveline thought incredible, she recovered her natural calm, even while her face was wet with tears, and told the chevalier that she had been overcome by recollections of the past, as recalled by a visit to the churchyard.

'Hein! you ladies are too easily impressed. What is the word, mon enfant? Impressionable; that is it. Come you this evening to the drawing-room, and the society will cheer you. That is what I come to say.'

'Did you know Mr. Lisle's second wife, sir?' asked Mrs. Roone, abruptly. 'I have been visiting their graves.'

Aveline trembled, for her manner was excited.

'I have seen her,' replied the chevalier. 'But madame knew her well. You see, the squire set his back up against all the

matches of his ladies, and, when I marry my dear woife, I offend him, though we were good friends before. Had I been then in possession of my title and château, he would have welcomed me as his nephew. Ma foi, Mistress Roone but that is life. And, all the time, he was doing the same himself. But it is bizarre.'

Here Madame d'Angère arrived in search of her missing spouse, and Aveline, keenly alive now to all misapprehension, wished she had persevered in her determination to leave the manor with her mother. But the chevalier held his own.

'I come, ma mie, to invite madame and la petite to be more sociable, and I find them in distress about a sentiment. Mistress Roone is interested in the story of your uncle's second wife. You can describe her better than I.'

'His second wife. I dislike the subject,

mon Alphonse,' replied madame, sinking into a chair, arranging her heavy crêpe trimming, and taking up her fan. 'You see, Mrs. Roone, she was first my aunt's maid, then my uncle's housekeeper, and at last she left under doubtful circumstances. She was certainly very handsome, very proud, and ambitious. But I liked her, and if my uncle really married her, as Mr. Moore says, of course he ought to have said so. It was shocking to think of her just coming back to see him and die, and he never to acknowledge it after all. It was very wrong indeed.'

'It was, it was!' echoed Mrs. Roone, with a glance at Aveline, which seemed to her like the old distressed, appealing look that she just remembered.

'I suppose Aveline inherits her love for wandering about in churchyards from you, Mrs. Roone. I always avoid them. They

make me melancholy. One begins to think of those sort of things, and I see no good in making myself miserable. Aveline, will you kindly help me to arrange my black velvet cap? It does not become me.'

'Ha, ha! she tink it too funereal. You will come to dinner, mon enfant. We miss you as the sunshine.'

'Not this evening, dear monsieur, if you will kindly excuse me. Mamma prefers remaining here, and I would rather not leave her,' replied Aveline.

The chevalier prepared to depart, and madame said she would await Aveline in her room; so mother and daughter were again left alone. Mrs. Roone was still much agitated, and Aveline sought to soothe her by repeating to her all she knew of the late Mrs. Lisle's history, and what she had gathered of Mr. Moore's discovery of the marriage. Her worst fears were

aroused, for she could not but perceive that her mother's voice and manner were strangely excited, and she sought to change the subject by speaking of the Australian plan.

'I could almost relinquish that, Aveline, if I were quite sure no one could again accuse me of insanity,' said Mrs. Roone. 'I am almost afraid of speaking, lest what I say should seem to be so chimerical that I shall be taken for a lunatic. When I first came here, I certainly was almost out of my mind, but you do not discover any trace even of wandering now, Aveline?'

'Oh, no! thank God, dearest mamma; you are quite yourself. But we must avoid exciting or melancholy scenes for the future, and perhaps you might be happier and freer if we were to go to Australia.'

'You do not wish it, I think, my child. Although you have not passed a very joy-

ous youth, yet you seem to have ties that bind you to the island. Is it not so, my darling?'

'The ties of gratitude, dear mamma; but they are not so strong as my love for you. If it could render you happier and more secure to go back to Australia, I will gladly accompany you. It might be best for both of us in many ways. We have no claim on anyone here, and I seem to be often more a trouble than a help to my benefactors. I scarcely understand why, but, while striving to please, I sometimes displease. Still, in the case of dear Lisle I have met with nothing but a gratitude that I do not deserve, and even Miss Elizabeth, who has never loved me, tries to be gracious and kind.'

'She is the young lady they call Quiz, who was at Fontainebleau,' said Mrs. Roone. 'I discovered then, both from

her manner and what your friend, Fanchon, said, that she was in some way jealous of you.'

'Jealous!' echoed Aveline.

'I fancied so, though she did not exactly let me perceive why. Fanchon was more communicative, but I could not understand her voluble French well enough to make out who was most jealous, madame or mademoiselle. I could, however, perceive that my darling had gained the love of all the dependents, and was thankful.'

Aveline grew thoughtful on her own account, as well as her mother's, when she found that the by-play of the château had been appreciated by the domestics, as well as their masters. She had yet to learn that our servants know our affairs as well, or better, than ourselves. The Fanchons of the Fontainebleau world, and the Lily-

whites of the Lisle domain, are equally discerning as regards the lives of their betters. As to Lilywhite, Mrs. Roone had also discovered, with the keen eye of love, that she too was jealous of Aveline, and she hinted as much to her child.

'My darling is open as daylight,' she added. 'But my sad experience makes me close as night.'

'Dear mamma, let us go to Australia. It will be best,' sighed Aveline.

'Go now to madame, and alter the cap, my love,' replied her mother, with an attempt at a smile; and Aveline went to madame's room, as previously requested.

CHAPTER XI.

AN ENCOUNTER ON THE DOWNS.

ONE of Aveline's duties was still to take the now elderly dogs for exercise. Madame took it into her head that an early walk would be good for Loulou, who was waxing fat, and Aveline, nothing loth, proposed a run on the downs before breakfast, suggesting that the morning air might give Loulou an appetite, while the toil uphill would reduce her size. Madame agreed, and one delightful morning Aveline and the pets were on the summit of the downs at eight o'clock. Mrs. Moore was not well, and her mother

was in attendance on her, so Aveline was easy in her mind for the moment. Her temperament, like her tread, was elastic, and the delicious air of the downs seemed to lend wings both to soul and body. She and the dogs chased one another until they were tired, and then they all sat down to rest, and to contemplate the glorious prospect before them. The wide expanse of cultivated meadow-land; the corn-fields ready for the sickle; the woods, scattered farmsteads, and mazy paths, all shone beneath the risen sun; while the waters of the distant Solent glowed with the reflection of his wondrous face, and the broad and blue Medina flowed majestically through the land.

The downs, too, with their adornments of gorse, heather, and bracken, were all alive with golden light, and each harebell and sprig of wild thyme rejoiced in the glory of

the morn. Diamond dew-drops still hung on the thorn, and glistened on the turf here and there, but these were quickly absorbed into the fount of day. The sky was serenely blue, flecked now and again with cloudlets, save where, in the east, the purple and golden hues of morn yet lingered. Beneath the down lay the manor and hamlet of Lisle, and so peaceful did they look that Aveline found herself wondering that ills of life could disturb them. So wondering, her prayers rose to Heaven for each inmate of manor and vicarage, as well as of cottage homes; and, finally, lingered with her mother. Her heart was always full of thanksgiving for the restoration of that dear parent, and she tried to forget the petty jealousies and daily worries in this absorbing thought.

Still her mother was a mystery even to her, and it pained her that she would not

confide to her the history of her early life. It was pleasant to her to watch the window of the room in which she knew she was, and to see that it sparkled like gold. It was delightful to her to feel that all her early protectors were so near; yet she felt that it must soon be her and her mother's lot to seek a home elsewhere. Can we wonder that a vision of Leonard and Captain Moore should present itself, or that her radiant face should grow more radiant still beneath the sheltering straw hat?

'Never, never!' she exclaimed aloud, and the dogs jumped up, as if summoned to proceed.

They did in effect run forward, but it was to meet another dog, with whom they began to make instant acquaintance. Aveline looked round and saw a countryman approaching.

'It is Dan Lane!' she exclaimed, jump-

ing up. 'Oh, Dan, I am glad to see you! Do you remember me?' she added, holding out her hand. 'You found my dear mamma.'

'I do knaw you be the little miss as Biles vound asleep,' replied Dan, looking sheepish, 'vor he told me as you and your ma was come back again. I be glad to zee 'ee.'

'Where is Toby?' asked Aveline.

'He be dead, but this dog be Toby too,' replied Dan.

While Aveline stooped to pat Toby the second, Leonard appeared in the opposite direction.

'You are an early bird, Aveline,' he exclaimed, when he recognised her, and held out his hand, giving the other to Dan, who shook it heartily; albeit it was the left.

Dan proceeded on his way, and Leonard

accompanied Aveline. They were silent awhile as they trod the springy turf. Leonard spoke first.

'I have been seeking an opportunity of seeing you again before returning to London, and now chance has provided it. Your mother says you look on me as your *brother*,'—his voice sounded almost bitter —'so you will forgive my speaking to you as such. Do you know what induced your mother to come to the manor, or perhaps to the village, the day of the squire's funeral?'

'I asked her the question, and her answer was that she had heard of Lisle when young, and that, wishing to put the sea between her and her fear of the asylum, she came to the island.'

'Strange! Why did you take her to see those graves?'

'She asked me to do so.'

'Did you ever see any member of your mother's family?'

'Never, that I remember.'

'Would you mind telling me her Christian name?'

'Evelyn. My mother changed it to Aveline for me.'

'Evelyn! Evelyn! I like Aveline best, perhaps because it is yours, my *sister*. That word would be pleasant if you were really my sister.'

Leonard paused as he pronounced these words, as if meditating on each sentence. Aveline was silent.

'You will be glad to learn that I have now an assured position, at least for the present,' he resumed.

'Yes—I wanted to congratulate you,' she replied, trembling.

'That sounds a cold word from your lips. It is what people say when "a mar-

riage is arranged," or a baby born. Everybody except my uncle has been saying to me, "Let me congratulate you." It is like the word "sympathise" when one is knocked down by a sudden affliction.'

'I am very, very glad!' exclaimed Aveline, turning upon him her radiant face.

'Thank you. That is the Aveline who said she loved me when she was a lonely child. Why can she not love me now she is a sweet and perfect woman?'

'I do! I do!'

Scarcely were those little words spoken when the face was again averted, the steps quickened.

'Stay, Aveline, stay! We may not meet alone again,' he said, laying his hand gently on her shoulder. 'Is it still but the love of a sister, or is it that holier, deeper, tenderer love which shall unite hearts till death divide them?'

'I cannot tell,' she replied, in breathless agitation.

'Has any other love come between us?—has that other——' he asked.

She shook her head with an impatient 'No!'

'Then why will you not give me the right to protect you and your mother? You will need aid, dear Aveline, in the hard struggles of life. I could work for three as well as one. You need never be parted from her.'

She stayed her steps, held out her hands, and looked into his face. Her eyes were full of tears, but oh, how fair she was!

'Don't—don't tempt me so!' she said, as he clasped the hands. 'What would they say if I dragged you down to our level? They think me designing and hypocritical now—what would they think then?'

'They! Who?'

'Everyone except the chevalier, and, perhaps, Helen. Dear madame would never have imagined evil but for unkind tongues. I see it all clearly now. Lily-white is at work again, and—and—others. Oh! I wish I had kept my resolution of leaving with mamma, when first I found her. But it seemed ungrateful to refuse to remain when my benefactors asked us to stay; for have they not all been benefactors?'

'You were right to remain, dear Aveline. But oh! come now to me, and let me shield you from harm and suspicious.'

'I must not—I cannot. You are my first, best friend, my—my dearest brother. Shall it be said that, as soon as your prospects brighten, I darken them—that I burden you not only with myself, the Blue School girl, the little servant, the humble

protégée of your friends, but with my insane mother?'

'You are proud, Aveline.'

'I am too proud for this.'

'And you would sacrifice my happiness for a chimera?'

'No, no; I would serve you as—as the domestic that I am. I pray for you always. You are ever in my thoughts; you have been my good angel from that moment when I first saw you at the porch of the old church below, and you are so still. When I am rebellious-minded, I think of you; when they suspect me, I know that you believe in me.'

'But they no longer suspect you, dear child. Your mind is overwrought. That silly fancy of madame's has been dispelled, and your devotion to poor Lisle has won all hearts.'

'Not all. If they knew what you are

saying to me this morning, everything would be repeated. Poor Lisle! he cared for me indeed.'

'And do not I, Aveline? Does not the chevalier? And, if I have heard aright, you have yet another——'

'Hush! But for this, I should still be happy, and madame and the rest would have been content with me. It was delightful at Fontainebleau till——'

'Till your rival, Quiz, came and stirred up strife, dear Aveline. Yet she is not bad at heart, only jealous. Like many others, she is always sinning and repenting.'

'If only you had fixed on her instead of me!'

'That would neither have suited me nor her parents, Aveline, nor, indeed, herself. She is little fitted to be a poor man's bride. But you?'

'Yes, thanks to your advice, I can do everything menial, from waiting on Frou-Frou and Loulou to superintending the wardrobe of their mistress. See, they have been listening, and think I call them —indeed, they want their breakfast. What o'clock is it? Hark! the old church clock is striking nine, and there is the manor breakfast-bell. What will they think?—what will they say?'

'"With thee conversing I forget all time,"' was on Leonard's lips, when Aveline hastened on. He kept pace with her and continued the conversation. They had some distance to walk along the summit of the down before they reached the zig-zag path that led to the village. Alone, each would have scrambled or slid down the turfy steep; together, they were willing to lengthen out the interview by a more circuitous way. Indeed, they again

soon forgot the hour and breakfast in the all engrossing argument of love. Breezes from the sea mingled with the fresh down air, and tended to invigorate both mind and body.

'The cattle on a thousand hills' lowed and bleated on down and dale; the quivering, lengthening, sustained cadences of many larks filled the atmosphere with harmony, and the hum of busy insects still told that summer had scarcely yet resigned her sceptre to autumn. All conspired to exhilarate happy youth; for even Aveline, despite her plaints, was happy in that rapid walk with Leonard at her side. Yet he pleaded on, with small success. Although a tender-hearted and impressionable girl, she was resolute when roused, and he had not imagined so much decision to lie beneath what seemed a bright and equable exterior. But then he

knew not the secret, self-restraint of woman. He did not realize that, in a state of dependence, the most amiable, open, candid, joyous of the sex must still be in subjection. It was only with the chevalier that Aveline was quite unrestrained, and this was misinterpreted.

'I assure you I have been very happy always,' she said, in answer to some anxious remark of Leonard's. 'And, now I have my dear mamma, what more can I desire?'

'What more? Oh, Aveline!' he said, reproachfully, and he saw that the colour rushed to her cheeks. 'But I will only torment you with one more question,' he added.

'You do not torment me,' she said, innocently, and he smiled.

'Were our situations reversed, and were you the rich lady and I the poor

dependent, would you then give me hope?' he asked.

'I would then give you all I had—all my wealth, all my baronial halls, all my fair lands, if they reached from this down to yonder sea, you should have them all,' she replied, with a radiant smile.

'And your heart, the richest gift of all?' he asked.

'As I have neither money nor land, I must not, cannot say,' she replied.

And with these words they reached the lane which led direct into the hamlet. In another minute they were midway between manor and vicarage. Here Leonard paused again for one more question, but not such as she feared, yet almost hoped for.

'Will you ask your mother to grant me a private interview before I leave the country? I promise not to name to her

the subject nearest my heart,' was what he said.

'I will tell mamma of your wish, but how can it be managed?' she returned.

'Easily. I will call at the manor and ask to see her. If the answer be that she is engaged, I shall understand.'

'May I not be present? Perhaps it may alarm her.'

'You need not fear, but I wish to see her alone.'

Aveline wondered; but she suddenly remembered the hour, and, with a mute pressure of the hand, they separated, the one entering the vicarage gate, the other hurrying through a private way to the manor.

They were not unobserved, for the inmates of both houses had been expecting them. Mr. Churchhouse and Quiz saw them from the vicarage window, and Lily-

white had previously watched them coming from the down.

'I say, what have you and Aveline been about?' greeted Leonard from his uncle.

'Taking our morning constitutional. We met by chance, and have had a very pleasant walk,' he replied, carelessly.

'We have finished breakfast, but your aunt has put the teapot and some buttered toast and bacon inside the fender. She thinks no end of you, now you are secretary,' laughed Mr. Churchhouse. 'You may have a candle all to yourself.'

'She is very kind, and I am sorry to give trouble,' said Leonard.

'Pour out his tea, Quiz,' added Mr. Churchhouse. 'I have been trying to amuse Quiz faute de mieux, as the chevalier says, but I now leave her in younger and more agreeable company, while I go to have a talk with Biles.'

'Leonard will not thank you, uncle,' remarked Quiz, nonchalantly. 'He dislikes *tête-à-têtes*, so do I. An Englishman can never keep up a conversation à deux beyond a quarter of an hour, and is often exhausted before that time expires. We are not a conversational race.'

'It has been said that you can get to the bottom of any man after one hour's private interview,' said Leonard, 'discover all his thoughts, talents, capabilities, and peculiarities. But the writer does not venture to affirm that you can fathom a woman in that space.'

'You must understand deep-sea fishing for that,' put in Mr. Churchhouse. 'Which reminds me of what one of my school-boys said the other day, when we were reading the last psalm. "Young men and maidens, old men and children," he read, and paused. "Why baint there old women too, sir?"

he added. "Oh, they be a verse above," affirmed another, confidently; "dragons and all deep."'

The vicar went off while they were all laughing at his story, and Leonard accompanied him to the door.

'I must give you another warning concerning Aveline,' said his uncle, in a low voice. 'If you are seen wandering over the downs before breakfast with her, all the parish will be agog. The poor will say you are engaged to be married, for they are more charitable than their betters; and the rich that Aveline is a flirt, and should not be allowed to meet young men at unseemly hours. Gossip is rife about her and her mother, as it is. We know that she is good as gold, but unfortunately she is good-looking as well.'

'Aveline's reputation is dear to me as my own,' returned Leonard, unguardedly.

'Ah, that's the way the wind blows! A dangerous quarter for you, my boy, with your ship only half afloat. Go back to Quiz, and forget the blonde in the brune. The chevalier Frenchifies us all.'

'Will it not be highly improper in the eyes of the island that we should breakfast alone together?' asked Leonard, sarcastically.

'Not a bit of it. Everybody knows that Quiz can take care of herself, but Aveline cannot.'

With a knowing look the vicar went towards the village, and Leonard to the breakfast-room.

CHAPTER XII.

WHAT FOLLOWED THE WALK ON THE DOWNS.

'I HOPE you enjoyed your walk, Leonard,' began Quiz, satirically, as she poured him out a cup of tea.

'I did and I didn't,' returned Leonard. 'Enjoyment means getting what one wants, and that is just what I did not effect. But I got an appetite, which is something.'

'I hope your walk with Aveline on the downs was more satisfactory than Captain Moore's in the forest of Fontainebleau. At any rate, she didn't run away from you as she did from him,' pursued Quiz.

'That is so far satisfactory,' pursued Leonard.

There was a silence, during which Quiz watched him as he demolished the lukewarm viands with good will.

'He cannot be disappointed,' she thought, 'or he would not eat so composedly. The captain is to renew his proposal at Christmas,' she said, aloud. 'I fancy, from Aunt Amicia's account, she will accept him. She is a lucky girl.'

'Why is she lucky, Quiz? Because Moore admires her? Then you are also lucky, for he admires you.'

'It is quite indifferent to me whether he admires me or not, Leonard. You men think we live only to be flattered by you.'

'I did not say so, Quiz. It was you who considered Aveline fortunate in securing Captain Moore's attention.'

'Of course a girl in her position is for-

tunate to have a chance of making a good match. But his parents would not approve. Aunt Amicia says that Mrs. Moore is much annoyed, in spite of her democratic American notions.'

'Has she told her? How kind of Aunt Amicia! I wonder Mrs. Moore harbours her and her mother.'

'It only came out the other day. Auntie and Mrs. Moore were having a long discussion about Aveline and her mother, and it slipped out like a stream of half-restrained water. You know how difficult it is for auntie to be secret.'

'Or any other woman. My dear Quiz, if the tongue is an unruly member in man, it is untameable in your sex; for, if it is bridled even, it manages to whisper just as a muzzled dog contrives to snap. Isabella is the only safe girl I know, for she speaks out her opinions. Your strong-minded

female is less dangerous than your weak.'

'Authorship makes you severe, Mr. Leonard Leigh.'

'Insinuations towards beauty and innocence do, Miss Elizabeth Dallimore.'

The pair looked at one another. Quiz drew herself up haughtily, and met Leonard's penetrating eyes for a moment unflinchingly; but they had a power over her that she could not resist, the power of truth. He who has no back-thought abashes scandal. She took up a fork and began nonchalantly to examine its crest.

'Forgive me, Quiz, if I am, as you say, severe,' he resumed. 'Aveline and I have been friends ever since I first tried to comfort her in this very house. I think I know her well, and I should believe her were she surrounded by a hundred chevaliers and beaux capitaines. What of the De Bellefontaine?'

Quiz coloured and looked more inquiringly at the crest.

'At any rate, Aveline has not succeeded in adding him to her list,' she said.

'You have supplanted her there, Quiz. Madame la Marquise de Bellefontaine sounds well,' he said, coldly.

Tears sprang to her eyes, and he repented his words. He had finished his breakfast, and rising went towards the window.

'Will you take a walk or a ride with me to-day, Quiz?' he asked, gently. 'We may do it with impunity, being in some sort cousins, and protected by respectable uncles and aunts. It seems hard, does it not? that the "unprotected female" cannot claim the same privilege?'

'If you mean Aveline, I am sure she has protectors enough! All my belongings are quite ready to assist her.'

This word 'assist' grated on Leonard's

susceptibilities, which were unusually acute that morning, and Quiz saw that he looked annoyed. She was rather pleased than otherwise, and told him that she should be happy either to walk or ride with him, as circumstances permitted. He accordingly asked if they might use his uncle's cob and an old pony that had belonged to his cousins, and having received permission they soon started for a scamper over the very downs trodden by him and Aveline in the morning.

Lilywhite, who saw everything, managed to inform Aveline of this, who had, with some difficulty, though quite ingenuously, explained her lengthened absence to her friends at the manor. Not that she had mentioned Leonard's renewed proposal, even to her mother; she had said, with truth, that they had met, walked together, and forgotten the hour. Now that she

heard he was gone for a ride with Quiz, a strange foreboding stole into her mind.

'He thinks I do not love him, and he must know that she cares for him,' she thought. 'Perhaps he will transfer his pitying affection for me to her. There would then be no obstacles. She is not, like me, a poor dependent, with a mother whom she can never leave, but in a good position, with sisters to supply her place. Then, how much handsomer she is than I am—more accomplished, better educated . . . . but not, the chevalier thinks, so well read—and certainly not so good a French scholar. How vain I am! not that I have much to be vain of. Ah, me! I daresay it might be all for the best; but I should lose my friend—my first, best, dearest friend.'

This prospect brought tears to her eyes, and, while she ran into the library to dry

them, the chevalier came in. He had been very discreet since the Fontainebleau misapprehensions, but, seeing the tears, he forgot all about them.

'What is it, ma petite? What have they been saying or doing now?' he said, taking her hand.

'Nothing—nothing, dear monsieur,' she replied, with a little sob, when in came Madame d'Angère.

'Some one has been making her cry again, ma mie,' he added to his wife, apologetically.

'She should not have walked so long alone with Leonard,' replied madame. 'Of course people will talk. You know they did before we were actually engaged, Alphonse.'

'But you were married in spite of them,' cried Aveline, with a smile as bright as her tears.

'Yes, but we never walked alone until we were engaged; and, if Captain Moore should hear of it, he may not come forward again,' returned madame.

She spoke rather warningly than unkindly, for she was, happily, convinced of the unfounded nature of her suspicions, and had returned to perfect marital allegiance. She was, besides, slightly offended with Mrs. Moore for the line she took concerning her son, that lady having assured her that he meant nothing, and would not pursue his suit. Had Mrs. Moore known of this little Fontainebleau mystery before she engaged Mrs. Roone, she would certainly not have asked her to remain at the manor, but have allowed her and Aveline to depart with such assistance as she could have offered them. Not expecting the captain, however, for some months, she let matters take their course, but was

of opinion that she should have been informed of the proposal before Aveline took up her abode with the d'Angères at the manor.

Aveline had herself pondered much over these things, and had wondered whether Mrs. Moore was acquainted with her son's proposal. The allusion made to it by madame on the present occasion, recalled the approach of Christmas, and its threatened renewal. She saw at once the need of decisive action, and, drying her tears, took it.

'Dear madame,' she said, excitedly, 'will you tell Captain Moore for me that I cannot change my mind. I would rather not see him again. Tell him I have found my dear mamma, and shall not marry. Say it kindly, as he spoke to me. If you remain here, perhaps we had better leave before he comes. Indeed, under all

circumstances, this is scarcely our place. Mrs. Moore has employed mamma partly out of charity, and you—dear madame, dear monsieur—you do not really want me.' Here her voice faltered.

'We do. We do,' they cried, simultaneously.

'I love you dearly—dearly,' she resumed. 'You have been all in all to me, and I owe everything to you. But I cannot leave my dear mamma. You see, you understand this, and you have no position for her either here or at Fontainebleau. We both think we could keep a little school somewhere. She is accomplished and clever, and says she was educated at first-class schools. I could teach French and help with the English. If we could live near you, it would be perfect.'

'But they want not the French teachers at Fontainebleau, mon enfant,' said the

chevalier, taking snuff, while madame put her handkerchief to her eyes.

'I have thought of that,' continued Aveline. 'But there I might teach English. I could then see you every day. I could still walk with the dogs, and do your dresses, dear madame, and sometimes read to you, dear monsieur; and now Fanchon knows your ways, and one of the Miss Dallimores might be on a visit, and you would not miss me.'

'Yes, we should,' said madame, plaintively, 'for, as my Alphonse says, you are the child of our adoption.'

This was too much for Aveline, and her tears again flowed. But she mastered them by a smile.

'If you will help me to find a place in France, perhaps mamma may be persuaded not to return to Australia,' she continued. 'She is not so much bent upon it as she

was, and begins to take delight in English scenes. Do you not think she is quite—quite well?'

'We do. Everyone does,' replied the chevalier.

Aveline felt happier after this conversation, and when she next found her mother alone she related its purport to her. Therewith she confided to her Captain Moore's proposal, but withheld Leonard's, fearing that her mother might consider herself the cause of its refusal.

'We cannot remain here,' said Mrs. Roone, decidedly. 'Do you love him, my darling?'

'No, mamma,' replied Aveline, shyly, laying her head on her mother's breast.

Afterwards they discussed Leonard's desire for a private interview, and the fond mother wondered if that were also caused by love for a daughter whom she was fain

to consider a 'rosebud of girls.' She trembled and hesitated slightly when she acquiesced in the wish, and the nervous manner alarmed Aveline. But when, not long after, Lilywhite appeared, and said, with an unpleasant air, that Mr. Leigh had called upon Mrs. Roone, she said, with calm self-possession, that she should be happy to see Mr. Leigh, would Lilywhite kindly show him up.

'Show him up, indeed! them's fine airs,' muttered Lilywhite, as she went downstairs. 'Tell Mr. Leigh he can go up to missus's new nurse,' she added to a footman, whom she encountered in the passage.

Aveline met Leonard on the landing, and showed him into the small sitting-room appropriated by Mr. Moore to her mother, and left them together.

He had not long returned from his ride

with Quiz, and had told her that he was going to the manor. This had displeased her, although she knew that he would probably not see Aveline. He had seen her, nevertheless, and had given her a glance so full of reproachful affection, as he closed the door upon her, that it brought a blush to her cheek. At the same time she was only thinking of her mother, and she silently breathed a prayer that, whatever the subject of the interview might be, it would not disturb her dear parent's composure.

She went to madame's room, where she was anxiously expected for a second consultation over the magnificent black velvet cap, considered by the authorities slightly too ponderous for her benefactor's ethereal proportions.

'Think of Leonard making a special call on your mother, Aveline,' began ma-

dame. 'That shows what a gentleman he is. No beating about the bush, like Captain Moore, who asked me not to name it to his family.'

'And I am afraid you have, dear madame?'

'Yes; but Quiz or the vicarage girls would have let it out if I hadn't. And now Mrs. Moore wants to see you.'

'Me! You have not told her what I said this morning, dear madame?'

'No, the chevalier advised me not. I daresay she will be here directly.'

Mrs. Moore came, indeed, at the moment, and was admitted. Aveline was frightened, though she had no reason to fear; for Mrs. Moore was a kind, good woman, who would not hurt a mouse, but who was yet easily roused when her children were concerned. Having begun by admiring the cap, turban, or helmet that

lay upon the bed, she turned to Aveline, and asked her abruptly if she corresponded with her son, Captain Moore. Aveline replied with a frightened 'No,' which Mrs. Moore scarcely heard.

'Because, if you do, you should not be walking alone with another young man, and making assignations with him, as I understand you have done,' she added, rapidly.

'I do not correspond with Captain Moore, and I never made an assignation in my life,' answered Aveline, roused by this unexpected attack.

'But I am told my son went all the way to Fontainebleau to see you, and actually proposed for you!'

'That was not my fault, Mrs. Moore. I wish he had never done so.'

'Yet you are taking a year to consider whether you will accept him or not?'

Aveline looked at Madame d'Angère, who took courage to say,

'That was a suggestion of the chevalier's and Captain Moore's. You see, Aveline is young, and they thought she might change her mind.'

'But I cannot—indeed I cannot!' ejaculated Aveline.

Mrs. Moore, instead of being delighted, was displeased. A few minutes before she had intended to reproach Aveline for winning her son's heart, now she was angry at her rejecting it. But whatever she had to say was cut short by a tap at the door and the entrance of Lilywhite.

'Please, ma'am, do you know where master is? Mr. Leigh is wanting him directly. He come out of your mother's company, Aveline.'

'Mr. Moore was smoking in the conservatory not long ago,' replied Mrs. Moore.

Aveline, fearing something had happened to her mother, left the room, and ran down a long corridor, where she suddenly met Leonard.

"What is the matter?' she gasped.

'Nothing. I merely want Mr. Moore,' he replied.

Reassured, she volunteered to find him, and proceeded to the conservatory, where he was with his pipe and newspaper. She delivered her message, and told him where she had left Leonard. He walked off at once, and Aveline lingered a few moments to collect her thoughts. It was now late in the afternoon, and she had passed a harassing day. But flowers always soothed and cheered her, and she turned with childish delight to these mute consolers. She wandered through the conservatory, now scenting a flower, now tenderly stroking a leaf, until her mind grew calm, and

she stood awhile silently reviewing the varied events of the past hours. She took herself to task for the unavoidable, and finally resolved to fly from all men, whether married or single. She began to think they were only created to torment the other sex. Then she smiled as she made an exception in favour of Leonard; but again she sighed and clasped her hands, remembering what she had said to him only that morning.

'How inconsistent I am,' she thought, as she glanced at a stephanotis. 'In spite of my darling mamma, I am wondering whether I shall ever wear a bridal wreath. A wreath! A poor dependent like me! How idle dreams are! But, if only I were rich, and he poor, how different the world would be. Ah me! it seems weary at times, though now I have all I ought to wish for; all I once fancied I could desire.'

So thinking, she left the conservatory reluctantly, to return to Madame d'Angère and the helmet. She was about to look into her mother's sitting-room as she passed it, but it was shut, and she heard voices within. She listened a moment, and Leonard's was distinctly audible, then Mr. Moore's, and, finally, her mother's gentler tones. They were evidently in grave discourse. What could they be talking about? She only hoped they would not unsettle her mother's mind again amongst them, and would allow them to quit the beautiful old manor peacefully, and seek their fortunes in another country, or on another continent.

In her perplexity, she began to think it would be best, both for her mother and herself, to go to Australia. Whatever her mother's secret—for she felt convinced she had one—she believed it would be

better concealed there than in the island. As to her own—for had she not one also? who has not?—she might lose or forget it in that far-away land.

She stole into a neighbouring room, and there awaited, impatiently, the breaking up of the little conclave.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOVE AFFAIRS.

'WHAT is the matter, Quiz? You look quite put out,' said Mrs. Churchhouse to her niece, after her return from her ride with Leonard.

'Nothing, aunt, except that the old pony will only trot,' replied Quiz, drawing up her habit preparatory to leaving the room.

'You certainly deserve a good horse, Quiz; you look so handsome in your habit and hat. Sophy and Lucy were not such good horsewomen as you are. Did you ride when you were in France?'

'I rode with Captain de Bellefontaine,

when I was staying at his father's château. We should have gone there again but for Lisle.'

'Ah! the girls told me that he admired you very much. I have just had letters from them, announcing their intention of coming home for Christmas. We shall be a large family party between the Moores and ourselves, and the chevalier and madame have decided to stay over Christmas. I'm sure I shall have difficulty in providing for them all. And Leonard says he will try to run down. What a clever, aristocratic-looking young man he is! Why, he is the talk of the island.'

'*You* never expected him to become celebrated, aunt?'

'Certainly not, though they say at the grammar-school that they always thought he would be somebody some day.'

'Nothing so easy as to foretell after the

event, aunt. I will go, and take off my things.'

Quiz went to her room, but, instead of taking off her things, she looked out of the window on the surrounding downs. Neither she nor Leonard ever divulged what passed between them during their ride, but it had evidently been displeasing to her.

'They must be engaged, or he would not speak of her so!' she muttered, turning from the window to the looking-glass. 'Let them! Still he almost said that she had refused him. Impossible! Yet I believe there is nothing she is not capable of doing. Let me be just, if not generous. She is better than I; less selfish, and more deserving of love. But not so handsome, Quiz, not so handsome. It may not be said that Aveline Roone, the poor charity-girl, made a better match than the daughter of Major Dallimore.'

She stood a moment before the glass, then paced the room, dragging the long habit after her. At last she threw the hat on the bed, and sat down before a writing-table. Upon it was a letter written on foreign paper, which had arrived while she was out. She contemplated the address on the foreign envelope, then opened it, and looked at the signature of the enclosed letter. It was 'Maximilien de Bellefontaine.' The letter was in French, and her acquaintance with that language was so imperfect that she read it with difficulty. She had not, like Aveline, taken advantage of the chevalier's instructions, but had preferred amusing herself with his mistakes in English. She understood, however, that it was a proposal of marriage, and her handsome face flushed and her heart beat quick as she strove to comprehend the elegant and

flowery language in which it was conveyed.

'I will accept him; I will consult the chevalier!' she exclaimed, in an excitement as unnatural as it was overpowering.

She threw off her habit and put on a walking-dress. She looked again into the glass and smiled at the reflection of the handsome and distinguished girl she was, handsomer than ever in her mourning-garb.

'La belle marquise!' she exclaimed, satirically, repeating Leonard's words.

She ran downstairs, but was met by her aunt, who insisted on her having some luncheon before she went out again. She swallowed a few mouthfuls, saying that, as they were all to dine late at the manor, luncheon did not signify.

'What is the matter with Quiz?' asked Mrs. Churchhouse of her husband, as she left the table.

'I should think she was in love. It is a common complaint of young people, and has lost us our daughters,' replied the vicar, ruefully. 'I hope Leonard hasn't caught it. He was not in time for breakfast, and now he isn't in for luncheon. He is generally punctual.'

'He went to the manor, and will probably have luncheon there,' returned Mrs. Churchhouse.

Quiz met the chevalier sauntering along the shrubbery, with a book of French poetry in one hand and his snuff-box in the other.

'I want to speak to you, uncle. Would you mind walking towards the pond with me?' she said, with agitation.

'Charmed,' he replied, and, putting his book under his arm, he accompanied her through the shrubberies, over the hill, and towards the silent, lonely pond. Thus

while Leonard was *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Roone, and Aveline undergoing her examination from Mrs. Moore, Quiz was confiding to the chevalier the proposal she had received from the son of his early friend. He asked if he might read the letter, and, after a little hesitation, she consented. He smiled and commented as he read aloud, translating certain sentences for the edification of the recipient.

'What do you think of it, uncle?' she inquired.

'That, if you accept him, you will have a much grander *parti* than has your aunt. His family, they are of the old *régime*—noble *sans peur et sans reproche*. He is what you English call "a fine fellow," and his proposition is quite *de régle*. He will be a marquis and rich. But he is *catholique*, and I think the man and his wife should be of the same faith.'

'I could accommodate myself to that,' said Quiz, whose religious convictions were transient, while her ambition was paramount.

'That is not the right word, my child. But, if you love one another, you will help each other to the truth according to Holy Scripture. It is, in my opinion, the first point to be considered in matrimony.'

Quiz had not expected the chevalier to take this serious view of the case, and she said there would be time enough to go into that part of it when she had made up her mind as to the rest. She was much excited, and he refrained from argument.

'It would reconcile your aunt to our château,' he said. 'She would have her desire in seeing you a marquise, and would feel no longer alone in a strange country, though the English are everywhere. Besides, if Aveline and her mother settle in

Fontainebleau as teachers, we shall feel at home.'

'Aveline and her mother!' echoed Quiz. 'I, for one, have had enough of them.'

'Yet Aveline has been of much service during our poor Lisle's illness,' said the chevalier, sniffing—for he could never speak of the boy without feeling inclined to cry.

'Yes, yes, uncle,' she replied, 'Aveline is good and I am bad. I know it. I do her justice, but we are better apart.'

To the chevalier's consternation, Quiz burst into tears. He was sympathetic, but, understanding nothing, knew not how to console her. He took her hand, and, as he always did when moved, spoke to her in French. He told her that he knew how much she would feel leaving her home and friends, and advised her to consider well before she decided. They were

seated where, years before, Leonard sat when he saw Aveline in the boat with Captain Moore and Lisle. The pond was silent, and the choristers had ceased to sing in the surrounding trees; but the autumn air was soft and fresh, and waved the shivering sedges.

'I wish I were at the bottom of that cold, clear pond,' sobbed Quiz.

'You shall not marry my friend De Bellefontaine with those sentiments!' exclaimed the chevalier, majestically.

She composed herself, and forced a laugh, which sounded shrill in the sylvan silence.

'I am tired,' she said. 'The letter has excited me. I do not really wish to drown myself. We are all dull, and life is monotonous just now. In your airy France I shall be gay and light-hearted, as all your women are, or seem to be. You will not say how foolish I have been?'

'Certainly not,' returned the puzzled Frenchman. 'But you will consult your parents.'

'To-morrow—I shall go home to-morrow. Thank you for explaining the letter. French lovers are not like English; their sentences are what we call perorations. I shall ask him to write in English, for he speaks it well, and I am ashamed of my French.'

'It is not my fault that you are not as perfect in the language as Aveline,' remarked the chevalier.

Quiz rose hastily, and they returned almost in silence. But the silence ceased when they separated. The loquacious chevalier went in search of his wife, and found her engaged with Aveline in reducing the proportions of the helmet afore-mentioned. Mrs. Moore had departed. He poured out the news at once.

Madame was enchanted, having no religious scruples.

Aveline was puzzled and even distressed at the first announcement, for she believed her rival to be attached to Leonard; but this was succeeded by an unaccountable sense of relief. Thanks to madame, before the dinner-hour came, Mrs. Moore was informed of the proposal, and she naturally passed it on to her husband; so that, when the Moores and d'Angères met in the drawing-room, and sat awaiting their guests from the vicarage, they were discussing what madame called 'her niece's delightful prospects.' But Quiz had not been so communicative, and when she, her aunt, uncle, and Leonard arrived, they were taken aback by Madame d'Angère's greeting.

'My dearest Quiz, it is delightful!' she cried, throwing her arms theatrically

round the annoyed girl. 'Captain de Bellefontaine is charming. I do congratulate you. So elegant and refined. So aristocratic and handsome. Such eyes! such a moustache! And the son of my Alphonse's earliest friend. I shall be quite happy at Fontainebleau when you are within reach. It is such a beautiful name. It sounds so well. La Marquise de Bellefontaine. For, you know, the father is old and will not live long.'

'He is just one year younger than I am, ma mie,' put in the chevalier, with a chuckle.

'But he is not in your robust health, mon Alphonse,' said madame, slightly distressed.

'I will not make you my confidant again,' whispered Quiz to him, irritably.

'What does it all mean?' asked the vicar. 'Quiz, what have you been about?

No wonder you have not said a satirical word all day.'

Dinner was announced, and Quiz was spared further questions, for the subject was too delicate for discussion before the servants.

'Is not Aveline coming?' asked Mr. Moore.

'She has dined with her mother,' replied his wife, briefly.

They, also, had been discussing their son's proposal to Aveline, and had disagreed concerning it.

The dinner was not particularly cheerful, for all the party, save Mr. and Mrs. Churchhouse, seemed pre-occupied. When it came to an end, and the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room, madame resumed her delighted cackle over her niece's prospects, and the truth evolved. Quiz did not dislike the prestige of the affair,

and bore all the comments and inquiries of the three married ladies composedly; and, when she thought that Leonard was probably listening to the chevalier's account of it at the same time, vanity and wounded pride changed to triumph.

Men are more reticent than women, and, when her male friends joined them, they refrained from congratulating her on what was, evidently, an unsettled love affair. She bore herself royally amongst them, and Leonard was almost pained by her cold, distant manner. Perhaps she also considered him cold and distant, and this strengthened her resolutions.

Aveline did not appear. She had been solicited to join the party both at dinner and in the evening, but had asked to be excused upon plea of her mother's loneliness. In addition to this, she could not face the company, after what had been

said of Leonard and Captain Moore in connection with herself. She was, indeed, anxious to leave the manor entirely, before the captain's possible arrival. She sounded her mother on the subject, as they sat quietly together. They were, nominally, at work, but the pressure of circumstances seemed to make their fingers listless, and the needles crept lazily through the fabrics on which they were engaged. Mrs. Roone was finishing a piece of embroidery to help Mrs. Moore, Aveline was doing an antimacassar in crewel work as a Christmas present for madame.

'Perhaps I am wrong to prevent your returning to Australia, dear mamma,' began Aveline, glancing anxiously at her mother's pale face and knitted brow. 'Should Miss Elizabeth Dallimore marry Captain de Bellefontaine, the chevalier and madame could do without me, having her within reach.'

'Mr. and Mrs. Moore seem to wish us to remain here for the present,' returned her mother, hesitating.

'I cannot yet quite understand why Mr. Leonard brought Mr. Moore to this room. I hope it had nothing to do with my unfortunate walk this morning, dear mamma.'

'Nothing whatever, Aveline. Mr. Moore wished to see me—or—or—your kind friend Mr. Leonard wished him to see me, and they came together.'

'Did you like Mr. Moore?'

'Oh, yes! He—he was—almost like a father. And he is very fond of you, my darling. He said Mrs. Moore was so much better since I had been with her, that he hoped we should stay here as long as they did. If you do not object, I think it a good plan.'

Mrs. Roone spoke excitedly, and Aveline,

whose way it was never to contradict her, assented at once. But she was not satisfied as regarded the visit of the gentlemen, though she did not venture to press the subject. Her object was to keep her mother's mind as much at ease as possible, and, though she longed to confide her own secrets and anxieties to her, she refrained, lest they should excite her. Still she asked herself continually, why was she excluded, if Leonard and Mr. Moore said nothing particular to her mother when they were all together? And why this sudden desire to remain in England, when at one time her wish was to return to Australia?

'You are very thoughtful, dear child,' said Mrs. Roone, suddenly. 'You are generally so bright and cheerful that one notices a change. For myself, to be with you, free and in my right mind, is happiness enough, whether here or elsewhere.

But you must not be sacrificed. As I think I told you when I was at Fontainebleau, I gathered that your life was not unclouded, in spite of the affection of your protectors; Fanchon said as much. Again here, Lilywhite does not fail to show that you are an object of jealousy to her, if not to others. But all this will come right. Most girls pass through this ordeal. You have won the esteem and confidence of every member of the family of your best of friends, Madame d'Angère, though you fancy, perhaps, you have failed. Both she and Mrs. Churchhouse have told me so, and that poor Mrs. Dallimore looks on you as a daughter, because you were so good to her boy, who loved you dearly. Mr. Moore even hinted that he hoped you would be, some day, his daughter. I hear nothing but good of you, and I bless God from my heart for restoring me to such a child.'

Aveline's work dropped from her hand, and she gazed astonished at her mother during this long speech. There was in her a calm decision that surprised her. She remembered, dimly, that her father used to call this obstinacy, and that the quiet, lady-like manner of the ill-used wife annoyed him, for she had never been other than a lady, even to him.

'You are surprised, my love,' she resumed, meeting Aveline's rapt gaze. 'I think you need have no fear, for the Australian life has restored me, and both Mr. Moore and your friend Leonard Leigh are convinced of my sanity, and will see that, under no circumstances, shall I be again condemned to an asylum.'

'It was for this, then, that you were so long together, dearest mamma,' said Aveline.

Her mother smiled, but gave no answer. Further conversation was prevented by a

tap at the door, which caused them hastily to resume their work as they said, 'Come in.' Leonard entered, to the surprise of both.

'I could not leave without wishing you good-bye,' he began. 'I have settled to return to London to-morrow, in order to accompany Mr. Moore. I have promised to be back for Christmas. I cannot sit down, they are about to break up the party.'

He looked at Aveline, whose work dropped again, and whose bright cheeks paled at this announcement.

'You will not forget what you said to me this morning, Aveline,' he continued.

'What was it?' asked her mother.

'She said that were she a rich lady and I the poor dependent—the lady help, in fact—she would give me all her wealth, all her fair lands, if they reached from down to sea.'

'She should, and a mother's fervent blessing should go with them,' said Mrs. Roone, in an agitated voice.

'But she would not promise me her love either with or without the wealth. She would not share my poverty, though she would give me all her riches. And I—I would share either good fortune or bad with her.'

'You mistake me, he does not understand, my dear mamma,' cried Aveline, looking from one to the other.

'But I do, my darling,' said her mother, 'be it wealth or be it poverty, I give her to you, Leonard Leigh.'

'Aveline, what do you say?' he asked.

'Just what I said this morning. I may not cloud your future by our present; I will not, I cannot!'

'Then you do not love me after all!' he said.

There was no reply, and, with a hasty farewell, he left the mother and child again alone together.

Aveline cast her arms about her mother, and gave way to her grief at parting from him.

'He is my best, first, dearest friend,' she sobbed. 'But I am sure that you feel that I cannot be a burden upon him now that his life is about to be fair. It must not be said of us, dear mamma, that we came to Lisle poor and dependent, were protected, and proved ungrateful.'

'I understand you, my darling; but you overrate what has been done for us; though I can never thank the chevalier, or indeed any member of the family, enough for their care of you. Still I was consigned to an asylum, you to a charity-school, or should have been but for the leadings of divine Providence. You have

repaid, to the best of your ability, the benefits you have received by willing service.'

'I never, never could repay them if I were to labour all my life,' interrupted Aveline. 'And I cannot bear to think that friends who have sheltered me, and educated me, should look upon me as designing, and ready to seize the first opportunity of raising myself by displeasing them. Neither could I ruin my dear brother's prospects by accepting what he offers, half in pity, half in—' here she paused.

'All in love, my child. But we will wait. I understand you and him. Let us wait. Let us wait.'

Mrs. Roone spoke excitedly, and poor Aveline was alarmed at her sudden energy. She took her hand gently, and resumed the old rôle of protector, which made her mother smile. Aveline smiled too, and both grew calm.

'We will go to Australia, dear mamma,' said the latter. 'We shall then convince everyone that we have no ulterior designs. Even Miss Elizabeth Dallimore will then believe I am not an intrigante, as she once called me.'

'But what if Mr. Leigh were to go also, Aveline? I heard Mr. Moore inquire of him whether he had made up his mind to remain at home or to emigrate to Australia; and his reply was that it depended on circumstances.'

'Impossible, dear mamma,' ejaculated Aveline. 'His fortune is secure, ours uncertain.'

'Wait. Everything is uncertain, except that you and I are not going to leave England, at least for the present,' said Mrs. Roone, with decision, and Aveline grew more and more perplexed over the course of her young life.

CHAPTER XIV.

AFTER TWELVE MONTHS.

THE excitement in the Dallimore family was great when Quiz returned home and announced her intention of accepting the proposal of marriage made to her by Captain de Bellefontaine. It roused her mother, irritated her father, and amused her sisters. Poor Mrs. Dallimore, who had been a prey to grief since Lisle's death, brightened up at the prospect of a wedding, and took it for granted that her daughter had lost her heart in France, which accounted for some eccentricities of temper since her return. It is strange how

little even mothers understand those enigmas known as their children's 'hearts.'

'She will not only have a position herself, but will be able to look after Amicia and the chevalier,' said Mrs. Dallimore.

'And their old château,' added Isabella. 'You have always been afraid they might make Aveline heiress.'

'Ah! poor Aveline! I can't think what will become of her and her mother when they leave the manor after Christmas,' rejoined Mrs. Dallimore.

'We might keep them there as caretakers till the chancery suit is concluded,' grumbled the major. 'It looks as if it would never be begun, for Conquest writes this morning of some hitch which must delay proceedings. I thought a friendly suit might be ended at once. It is iniquitous that a father can't inherit after his son without all this bother.'

'But that old deed says that if there is no will it must go in the direct line, whether male or female,' said Isabella, stoutly.

'What do you know of law, miss? Am not I in the direct line from my son?'

Mrs. Dallimore began to cry, as she always did at the mention of Lisle, and Quiz, who had been listening as if she had no interest in the matter, interrupted the conversation by asking if Captain de Bellefontaine might pay them a visit when convenient to him.

'How shall we understand one another? I wish you had picked up a native instead of a foreign grandee,' returned the major.

'He speaks beautiful English,' replied Quiz.

'Let him come then, by all means,' said the major.

'We shall not know what to give him to eat,' moaned Mrs. Dallimore. 'We don't understand haricots and such things as the French do.'

'We must have Aveline back. She knows all about it,' put in Isabella.

'Always Aveline!' muttered Quiz, a shade passing over her handsome face.

In truth, the 'green-eyed monster' was with her still. Although she had accepted Captain de Bellefontaine in a moment of jealous irritation, she thought much of Leonard, and was uncertain whether, after all, some words he let fall during their memorable ride, had been serious or jesting. She was conscious that she had betrayed herself to him, not only as wilful, capricious, ambitious, and proud, but as much interested in him. She had spoken unadvisedly of Aveline, and had received a reproof that she believed could only have

fallen from the lips of a lover, it was so warmly administered. Still Leonard was generous and kind, and she fancied that if only Aveline and her mother went to Australia he might return to his boyish allegiance to herself. But she had pledged herself to a marquis, which, after all, suited her better than to be the wife of a poor author, so she would let things take their course.

'Is a marquise really as high as a marchioness, Quiz?' asked Helen, sentimentally.

'I suppose they are identical, allowing for difference of nationality,' she replied. 'I hope I shall lose that odious name when I leave the island. Mademoiselle Kiz is possible, but not la Marquise Kiz.'

She laughed. She was accustoming herself to her prospects. After all, the handsome Frenchman was just as good as

the handsome Englishman, she thought, with a pang at her heart.

Of course it took time to settle these momentous affairs. Letters passed between Captain de Bellefontaine and Major Dallimore, as well as between the marquis and the chevalier, and they were quite satisfactory. The correspondence between the young people was regular and, to all appearance, delightful; but Quiz showed no more love-letters. Her engagement was duly announced, though there was naturally no talk of marriage till the year of mourning had expired. Captain de Bellefontaine was unable to visit England immediately, and she secretly hoped that she might be permitted to return with her uncle and aunt to Fontainebleau, and meet him there. She shrank, she knew not why, from his actually appearing till Leonard's Christmas visit was over.

He, meanwhile, had bid farewell to Chancery Lane and the 'chamber' in the Temple, and was located in a second floor in Jermyn Street. He left the spot, where he had struggled through so many difficulties, with sincere regret. He knew that no rooms, however superior, could be as dear to him as that which looked out upon the ancient court, the big tree, and the sparrow's nest; no window so convenient for his old davenport as the one he was forsaking; no landlady so obligingly protective as his 'laundress' Pluckrose. His parting with her was almost pathetic. The handsome douceur he left with her, and which emptied his pocket, did not console her for his loss; for, as she said, 'she had took a fancy to him at the first, and she had seen too many young men to make mistakes in their physiogomy.'

'I shall come to see you in your own

house, if you will let me, Mrs. Pluckrose,' he said. 'Then I can look in upon the gardens and the children. I am sorry to leave them.'

'You'll always find open 'ouse, sir. And, if you'll take a cup o' tea, I shall be proud to make it,' she replied.

'And I shall be proud to take it,' responded Leonard. 'When I have more time to myself, I hope to explore what they call the "back slums," and judge of myself how the London poor live.'

'They lives as best they can, sir,' said Pluckrose, with an offended air, 'and I thinks it very impertinent of them as calls themselves our betters, to miscall our 'ouses and 'omes by such words as "slums." If they disapproves of our dwellings, let 'em build us superior ones and we won't be above inhabiting them. They as knows no better talks of city arabs, and ragged

schools, and gutter children, and the dangerous classes, and the laps-masses —whatever that may mean; I s'pose it's what I hears the gentlemen talk of as a laps-lingo; but they'd better spend their money mending of 'em, than lose their time in talk.'

'But, Mrs. Pluckrose, I did not mean to be personal. You are in a perfectly different position,' interrupted Leonard.

'That's only because I've got work, and God gives me health to do it, sir. Lor' bless you, I hears enough palaver about the London poor to make one sick; and I longs to say, "If you look upon us as pigs, why don't you tidy up our styes." There's enough money in London to do it, but there hain't as many Peabodys and baronesses as there ought to be, says I.'

'But we are improving, Mrs. Pluckrose.'

'Slow's the word then, sir; but the Lord is merciful, and we're thankful for what comes. I hopes as He'll bless you, and make you a blessing to the "laps-masses."'

Pluckrose laughed, and Leonard joined, though it was, as the old saying is, 'at the wrong side of his mouth,' for he felt the truth of her words, and inwardly prayed that he might be enabled, both by pen and personal effort, to help the poor. Never had he shaken hands more heartily than he did with his laundress, and never, we venture to assert, did he fail to visit and benefit her when opportunity offered.

As he went from her to the office, he related the pith of the conversation to Mr. Charles Conquest, and made that preoccupied but worthy lawyer rub his forehead thoughtfully, and say there was much truth

in the theory. But he had no time to lose, and was soon engaged in Leonard's affairs.

'We shall be very sorry to lose you,' he said, 'but I daresay the diplomatic line will suit you best. We've worked you pretty hard, but my lord will work you harder, or I'm mistaken. However, with your pluck and perseverance, you are sure to get on. You won't forget to meet Moore here on the 20th. 'Tis an awkward business, and, if he finds all correct, will overthrow everybody. You can keep a secret, which is a grand power in diplomacy as well as in law. You might have worked up to a partnership here in time, with your capabilities.'

'Thank you, Mr. Charles, for all your kindness. But for you and Mr. Conquest, I should now be toiling in the bank,' replied Leonard.

'Say, rather, but for your own indomitable will and talent for scribbling,' laughed the lawyer. 'That novel of yours did the work. When is the next coming out?'

'In the spring, I hope—at least, if not a novel, a book of some sort.'

But Leonard found writing much more difficult in Jermyn Street than in the Temple, and the davenport was pushed from corner to corner with a view to quiet. His salary began at once, but his patron was abroad, and he would not have much to do for him till his return; and he had, therefore, reckoned upon leisure for literature. But the literary work seemed curious. He sat hour after hour at his davenport, with the squire's old papers before him, drawing up a concise *résumé* of their contents, which might be, in short, the plot of the new novel.

Having become 'known to fame,' and

being handsome, agreeable, and a bachelor, he was, at this period of his life, besieged with invitations. He was no curmudgeon, still he could not but remember that, not so long ago, he had received no such civilities, and he could not help misdoubting the mere politenesses of the world and society. He had the moral courage, therefore, to keep back from the vortex that opened before him. He also kept alight that spiritual torch kindled by prayer, which will ever lead a young man safely through the tempting paths of flattery, dissipation, and infidelity. He made a point, however, of accepting all Mrs. Conquest's invitations, and of ignoring how rare they had been during the ignoble period of his clerkship. He dined there more than once to meet Mr. Moore and Mr. Charles Conquest, and each time took with him the squire's manu-

scripts. All this time he was thinking much of Aveline and her mother. He was fain to fear that Aveline did not love him with other than a sister's love. If he could have nourished that mean passion of jealousy which he reprobated in Quiz, he would have been jealous of Captain Moore. But he resolutely put the feeling from him, and strove to believe that Aveline's persistent refusal did really arise solely from the reasons she gave, and that perhaps he might win her by-and-by. If ever there was a pure and unselfish love, it was his. And to be pure, love must be unselfish.

Had he been at the manor a few days before he actually went to Lisle, he would have discovered that he need not have been jealous.

Captain Moore arrived there unexpectedly. His father was from home, and, for

the first time in her life, his mother was sorry to see him. He had written to say that he could not get leave, but, after all, he had secured a fortnight, and had come from turbulent Ireland to the peaceful island for Christmas.

Aveline trembled when the chevalier told her of his arrival, and resolved to keep out of his way. She begged Madame d'Angère to aid her, by not asking her to join the family party at all, and madame, seeing that she had made mischief by disclosing the captain's proposal prematurely, promised. The chevalier laughed, and said it would be no use; for the resolute lover had already inquired for her of him.

Mr. Moore came home the day after his son. He was delighted to see him, but was in such a fussy, excited state that his wife did not know what to make of

him. When she alluded to the dangerous proximity of her son and Aveline, all he said was, 'Let them marry. Let him propose at once. The best thing he can do.' And he rubbed his hands cheerfully as he spoke. It was a perplexing alternative for poor Mrs. Moore. Besides, he brought news that everybody was coming to Lisle that Christmas.

'We must have both the boys and their wives here,' he said; 'for Mrs. Conquest has resolved to pay her sister a visit. She and Conquest and young Leigh will be enough for the vicarage, and will fuss Mrs. Churchhouse to death. It seems that Sophy and Lucy quite won their aunt's heart, and that the journeying with them, after Fontainebleau, did her a world more good than doing Banting; so that Conquest declares there's no keeping her at home now. We shall be quite a family

party, my dear; for of course Moores and Lisles are all one family now.'

'Ah, yes! they are all very nice people, and I wish Willie had married one of the Miss Dallimores, instead of taking this fancy to Aveline. Not but that I like her mother very much. She is so judicious, that I feel quite another person since she has attended to me. Between ourselves, she is quite as good a lady as any of these bumptious Englishwomen.'

'Ha, ha, ha! All right. You Yankees don't take kindly to the English ladies, because they think you vulgar. But that's a mistake—nothing but exclusiveness. When we pay our little visit to America, we'll set that square.'

Aveline contrived to evade Captain Moore, and, strange as it may seem, two days passed without his falling in with her. He had recourse to the chevalier.

Seated on either side of the great log fire in the library, they discussed his possible success. The chevalier told him that he believed Aveline had resolved to devote herself to her mother, and that he had never questioned her concerning her feelings since that evening at the château.

'Will you do so, then, chevalier?' said the impatient officer. 'Had I known she was here, I should have come over before; but I only heard it a couple of days before I left Ireland. Tell her I must see her, for I have come for her decision.'

Almost while he spoke, Aveline came into the library in search of Madame d'Angère. She was about to withdraw when she saw Captain Moore, but a sense of what was due to him prevented her, and she met him, as he rose hastily, and went towards her. Both were embarrassed, but the chevalier interposed with a question that certainly confounded them.

'You come àpropos, ma petite. I was in the act of seeking you on behalf of our good friend the captain. He wish to know if you have changed your mind, and if you will be more polite in your manners than you were when last he parted from you.'

The chevalier took out his snuff-box, and looked at the discomfited pair.

'This is too abrupt, too unceremonious,' said Captain Moore, annoyed.

Aveline took refuge with the chevalier, and, standing at his side, whispered to him that she had not changed her mind.

'I am sorry for it. You must tell him so yourself,' he replied.

She looked towards the captain, who had followed her, and was leaning against the carved mantelpiece. She resolved to speak to him decidedly in the presence of her protector; but whether his fiery moustache and resolute face frightened her, or

whether shyness overpowered her, she knew not, but words would not come. Her head drooped, and she remained silent. He interpreted this favourably.

'May I hope that the cruel twelve-months you prescribed——' he began, in measured tones.

'I did not prescribe them!' she exclaimed, hastily. 'Was it not you, dear monsieur?'

She felt intuitively that she must now decide for herself, and that she was old enough to do so.

'It was settled amongst us, I believe,' replied the chevalier, penitently.

'Then I have not changed my mind, Captain Moore,' she began, bravely. 'I have now my mother, with whom I mean to live. I am much obliged to you for your kindness, but——'

'Pshaw!' broke in the captain, gazing at the lovely face. 'Obligation is beside

the question in such a case as this. Your mother shall be provided for, and, if there is no other obstacle, you will perhaps be less hasty than you were in the forest of Fontainebleau.'

A slight smile moved the fiery moustache.

'I fear I was not only hasty, but rude,' she said, humbly; 'but—dear monsieur, pray speak for me,' she added, in a whisper to her friend. 'Tell him that I cannot—I cannot.' Then, again aloud, 'The chevalier will assure you that I am quite serious and sincere. I am sorry if he—if I—if they gave you to understand that time would change my feelings, but they are unaltered.'

Hereupon she glanced with a sort of apologetic gesture at the captain, and hastily left the room.

CHAPTER XV.

A FAMILY CONCLAVE.

THERE was great commotion at Lisle Manor one morning before Christmas. Mr. Moore had invited the near relatives of the late squire to meet him there on a matter of business, and Mr. and Mrs. Churchhouse, Mr. and Mrs. Conquest, the chevalier and Madame d'Angère, and Major Dallimore responded to the summons. Mrs. Dallimore excused herself upon plea of inability to join so large a party. Leonard Leigh was also bidden, and Mrs. Moore was present. They all met in the dining-room, and formed quite a solemn conclave, three only of the ten

individuals knowing for what reason they had met.

Mr. Moore, who had a way of his own in all things, seated them round the oaken table, and took the head of it, much as if they were going to luncheon, only the viands were absent. It was evidently serious, and the assembly looked almost as surprised and subdued as did their ancestors who gazed upon them from the surrounding walls. Right above the high mantelpiece was the squire himself, not as anyone present remembered him, but in his comely youth. The face was handsome, but grave, and the expression haughty. The portrait had been painted by a celebrated artist, and the cold but penetrating grey eyes seemed to follow the movements of his nieces and nephews-in-law as they took their places at the board where he formerly presided, and awaited what Mr. Moore had to say.

That gentleman stood up, hemmed, cleared his throat, and looked round the table. He knew not what nerves meant; still he hesitated slightly as he pronounced what might have been a short funeral oration, and did, in effect, sound as a knell to some of his hearers.

'My friends, I have made a discovery that concerns us all. Mrs. Roone, who is now in this house, is the daughter of the late Worseley Lisle, Esquire, of this manor, and of my sister, his lawful wife.'

The countenances of his hearers looked as if suddenly confronted by the dead squire himself. Startled exclamations fell from them; eager movements were made. Mr. Moore waved his hand and continued.

'I am as sure of what I state as that I stand before you all alive this day. As you know, I took the manor on my dead sister's account, and I have found the certificate of her marriage with Mr. Lisle

at Bristol. This discovery was due to papers found by Leonard Leigh in the old davenport left by the squire to him.'

All faces were turned inquiringly to Leonard, who said,

'Mr. Moore is stating facts.'

Major Dallimore half rose, and was about to protest, when Mr. Moore resumed.

'Having my attention drawn to Mrs. Roone by various causes, I made it my business not long since to seek an interview with her, and learnt, from her own lips, that she was actually the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Lisle.'

'Then why did she not say so?' came from several voices.

'Owing to her temporary insanity. She despaired of establishing the fact, and feared that she would be confined in an asylum if she asserted it. It was only by chance that she learnt that her mother's

marriage was acknowledged here. As some of you know, I have been to and fro to Bristol of late, and only returned from my last trip the day before yesterday. I have succeeded in discovering the certificate of the birth of Evelyn Lisle, child of Worseley and Marian Lisle, and even in tracing people who knew them and their daughter. I have, also, the certificate of the marriage of Evelyn Lisle and Martin Roone, solemnised without parental consent, but none the less valid. In short, I have clearly established the fact that the Mrs. Roone, at present in this house, is my niece, and a relative or connection of everyone here present, except Leonard Leigh, to whom this discovery is due.'

'We ought to be much obliged to him,' put in the vicar, looking at his nephew.

'Not to me, uncle, but my legacy,' returned Leonard. 'A latent sense of justice

in the squire prevented his destroying all these old letters, which he left to me in the davenport, with his written command to "make wrong right."'

He laid his hand on several packets of discoloured documents, which we have glanced at before. Six pairs of eager, questioning eyes were turned towards him and them, and six tongues moved for speech. The latter were stayed by a word from Mr. Conquest.

'Let Leonard tell his tale. I vouch for its truth, and my wife is one of the interested parties.'

'I should think so!' she exclaimed, angrily.

'All these letters are arranged for your perusal,' began Leonard, looking round. 'They filled every cranny of the davenport, and were thrust into it without attention to date or person. On the lid of the

davenport, which Mr. Moore has had brought down and which is in this room, is inscribed the squire's request to me.'

Mr. Moore rose, and pushed forward that precious old escritoire, towards which the eyes aforesaid turned.

'Better not examine it till Leigh has told his tale,' said Conquest, decidedly, when all the party rose.

They reseated themselves, and Leonard proceeded.

'As you will all read these letters, I will only tell you briefly what they prove. They are, for the most part, from the squire's second wife to him. Those written before the marriage are signed M. C., those after, M. L. They are disjointed, and written at long intervals. They are, with one or two exceptions, from Bristol. When puzzling over them, I certainly fancied they must have originated from

the Miss Cunninghame, of whom I had heard as first living with the squire as housekeeper, and finally coming to the manor to die. This induced me to make many inquiries concerning her, and led to Mr. Moore speaking to me about her, and to my confiding the search of the letters to him. It was, therefore, through my instrumentality, or rather these letters, that he discovered her marriage.'

'And a fine mess you have made of it,' grumbled the major.

'But it was not he who caused me first to rent the manor, in order to find out the truth about my sister,' said Mr. Moore, hotly. 'The squire must have been a confounded old villain——'

'Hush! my dear,' whispered Mrs. Moore, 'Remember his three nieces.'

'Bosh! They've forgotten him long ago. Remember *my* niece and great-niece!'

'Aveline! Now what relation will she be to us, Alphonse?' asked Madame d'Angère.

'What you call German cousin,' replied the chevalier, which made the vicar burst out laughing, and caused a diversion.

'Go on! go on!' exclaimed the irritated major.

'Some time after these letters began to be signed M. L.,' continued Leonard, 'allusion was made to little Eva. Then there is a gap in the correspondence, until Eva's rapid progress at school is mentioned. Finally, in a letter, bearing date about twenty years ago, there is a heart-rending appeal for forgiveness for Eva.'

'That was on account of her marriage with Roone, the scoundrel,' interrupted Mr. Moore. 'Here are the certificates of her birth and marriage. Evelyn Lisle, she is called in both.'

Mr. Moore touched some papers before him on the table, and Leonard continued.

'There are a few more letters, at intervals of several months, on the same subject. They contain pitiful appeals for Eva. Then the correspondence ceases; and this cessation happens a few weeks prior to the death of Mrs. Lisle, here at the manor. Some years after this event, Mrs. Roone and her little girl appeared on the very day of the squire's funeral. You all know their subsequent history. I used to wonder what brought them to Lisle, but as Mrs. Roone was accredited drowned, and Aveline knew nothing of her mother's history, I could not ascertain. Still it haunted me that Mrs. Roone must have been, in some way, connected with the M. C. of the letters, and, when she turned up again some months ago, I resolved to question her. I did so when I

was here last autumn, and Mr. Moore and I were both convinced that she was the Eva of the letters, the daughter, in fact, of Mr. and Mrs. Lisle, and—— But she must tell her own tale. I have concluded mine.'

'And you have been at this all these years, Leonard Leigh! secretly, silently?' exclaimed Mr. Churchhouse, reproachfully. 'I thought you more open.'

'Yes, uncle. I have obeyed the squire's last request. You read his letter to me. Perhaps you will now read aloud the paper fastened to the lid of the davenport.'

Mr. Churchhouse rose, opened the now empty desk, and read what we have seen, but will repeat.

'The contents of this davenport are for the eyes of Leonard Leigh alone. If he find that he can make wrong right, let him do so; if not, let him respect the memory of one too proud and reserved to

be just. I, Worseley Lisle, scarcely remember what I have from to time, and year after year, confided to the keeping of this silent friend; therefore, I dare not burn the papers, and have not courage to examine them. Let Leonard Leigh look them through, but not publish them to the world, unless he can thereby benefit any individual named in them. I trust his honour.'

'I am thankful to be able to do the same,' said the vicar, looking across the table at Leonard. 'The squire and the Almighty have used you as an instrument; may it be for good. At all events, the lawsuit will cease, and both coat and cloak go to their rightful owners.'

'And we shall neither have the oyster nor the shells,' said Conquest, ruefully.

'I don't believe the story—it is all trumped-up,' cried the major, whose stake had been the largest. 'I won't hear of

such interlopers. Mr. Moore and Leonard ought to be——'

'Hush!' interposed Mr. Conquest, who sat next to him. 'You had better hear Mrs. Roone's version before you forget yourself.'

Mr. Moore left the room, and during his absence the other gentlemen whispered together, while comments and inquiries poured out of every female mouth.

'If this is true, we shall be no better off than we were before,' said Mrs. Churchhouse, 'and that poor mad woman will have what is properly ours.'

'I suppose it could not be ours if Uncle Lisle really had a child,' volunteered Madame d'Angère. 'It is very puzzling, Alphonse; but I am glad about Aveline. My German cousin.'

'Cousin-german, he means, Amicia,' puffed out Mrs. Conquest. 'I think it iniquitous.'

'It is only just, if my husband's niece is heiress of Lisle Manor, that she come to her inheritance,' put in Mrs. Moore.

These and other remarks were interrupted by the return of Mr. Moore, accompanied by Mrs. Roone and Aveline. There was a general movement when they appeared, but Leonard quietly vacated his chair for Mrs. Roone, placed another for Aveline by her side, and stood himself behind them. Mrs. Roone had the chevalier on her other side. She bowed slightly as she took her seat, and now all eyes were turned on her. She looked very pale, and the dark brown dress and white cap and collar seemed to intensify the absence of colour in face and hair. Aveline, on the contrary, was literally like a blush-rose clinging to her side. Her one idea was to support her mother, and she sat as closely to her as she could, and placed one hand in hers. She had been

hastily prepared by Mr. Moore for a scene, but knew not what was to be evolved. But Mrs. Roone was perfectly composed, and awaited the invitation to speak. It came from Mr. Conquest.

'Would you kindly tell us what brought you to Lisle, and any particulars of your previous history that can throw light on Squire Lisle's bequest to Leonard Leigh?'

'I came to inquire of my father concerning my mother,' replied Mrs. Roone, looking at Mr. Conquest. 'I knew nothing of the history of either until a year or so before my mother's death. During my unmarried life she lived in great seclusion midway between Bristol and Clifton, and my father, the late Mr. Lisle, resided with her during a portion of the year. He would come and go, and, when I asked her why he was not always with us, she replied, for family reasons that I could not be made acquainted with. As I passed

my childhood and girlhood at school, I saw comparatively little of him, and, when he chanced to come during my holidays, I was afraid of him. Still I believe he was very fond of me, and made me handsome presents, among which was a gold locket that I have worn ever since, containing photographs of him and my mother. This I was cautioned not to show until I received permission, but, having received it, I can now make it public.'

She unclasped a locket from an invisible chain that she wore and gave it to Leonard. He, having seen it before, opened it and passed it on to the chevalier.

'It is the squire himself!' exclaimed the astonished Frenchman, putting it into his wife's hands.

'Yes, it is poor, dear uncle!' said madame, in a voice of weeping. 'It is all very romantic. Aveline, could you have believed it?'

Aveline was too bewildered to hear, much less to answer, this question; and, as the photographs passed from one to another, she clung closer to her mother, and listened breathlessly.

'There is no doubt that this is Mr. Lisle,' said the vicar, having put on his spectacles.

'And it is quite certain that the reverse likeness is my half-sister, Marian,' added Mr. Moore.

'The photographs are not necessary to prove the facts, but they help to confirm them,' remarked Leonard, while a variety of exclamations proceeded from those who examined the locket. Not even the major could refuse to acknowledge that one of the photographs was the squire.

'Will you kindly proceed, Mrs. Roone,' he said, grimly, but a terrified look from Aveline softened him; for he remembered his boy, who, after all, had been only heir through some whim of his great-uncle's.

'When I was eighteen,' continued Mrs. Roone, turning to Aveline, 'I married your father, contrary to the wishes of both my parents. I have suffered for my disobedience, and so has my poor child; though we can never sufficiently thank those who befriended us.'

Her voice faltered, and she glanced timidly round the table, until her eyes rested on the chevalier and Madame d'Angère.

'The child has done more for us than we for her, is it not, mon amie?' said the chevalier, opening his snuff-box.

'Yes, yes,' replied madame, her lace handkerchief at her eyes.

Aveline could scarcely restrain her sobs, but a gentle touch and whisper from Leonard composed her, and her arm now circled her mother's waist.

'After my marriage,' resumed Mrs. Roone, looking down, 'I saw and heard

nothing of my parents for some time. I went a voyage with my husband, Captain Roone, and when we returned to England we landed at North Shields. There my child was born, and thence I wrote to my mother. She came to me at once, she said, without my father's knowledge. He was not with her at the time. She told me that she had interceded for me until she had mortally offended him. When I asked where he was, she gave me his address at this place, and bade me write to him. I did so, humbly, but received no answer. Then she told me a portion of her story, and I learnt that she had been my father's housekeeper before she became his wife, and that he was too proud to acknowledge his marriage, though he frequently promised to do so. This humbled and angered me, and I resolved to forget him as he did me. She also said that she had a half-brother in Australia named Moore, of whom she

had lost sight owing to these circumstances, and gave me his address at Melbourne. My husband was away at this time, and she remained some weeks with me. Before she left, she had almost made up her mind to go to my father direct, and insist on the avowal of the marriage, and of my existence. When we parted, it was for the last time. I never saw her again.'

'My dear, dear mamma,' sobbed Aveline.

Here Mrs. Roone's voice faltered, and all the ladies shed tears; but with an effort she continued after a short interval.

'From this period I remember little. They said I was insane; perhaps I was. I know I was in delicate health after my child's birth, and that my husband declared me out of my mind. I had promised my mother not to tell him her story, and he was angry at her and my father's displeasure at our marriage. He was of a violent temper, I, perhaps, was too meek, and I

became melancholy; much as I was, in short, when I first came here. I was placed in an asylum, but, thanks to the good woman who took care of Aveline, released after a time.

'But again and again I was shut up, with a similar result, until my husband's death. Then our faithful servant procured my release, and she went with us to Bristol in search of my mother. The house she had lived in was occupied by strangers, who knew nothing of the former tenants. I was in no position to make inquiries, so I determined to come to this place in search of my father, in order to learn something of my mother.

'I scarcely know whether I was in my senses or not, for the sights and sounds of an asylum would drive a sane person mad; but I am aware that I was in a strange, gloomy, silent state of mind, over which

no one but my child, Aveline, had any control. I was, besides, in terror night and day of being again shut up.

'I scarcely know how we got here, or whether, when we arrived, I was actually insane or not. I followed my own father's coffin to his grave, heard his funeral service, and cast flowers on the coffin-lid without realising whose funeral I was attending. I believe I asked, for I remember the words, "Hush! Squire Lisle." I know not what followed, but subsequently I heard one spectator remark to another, "Think of Squire Lisle buried by the side of his housekeeper, Miss Cunninghame!" Such a terror seized me that I was unconscious of what followed. "Dead and the marriage unacknowledged," was all I realised, and I fled from the spot.

'The remainder of my history you all know. I had neither sense nor nerve to

seek to establish my parentage, and the prospect of being again sent to an asylum overpowered what little reason and maternal love remained to me. I forgot all but my personal freedom, and ran away in the dead of night, leaving the only creature I had to love, or who loved me, to strangers, who were far more pitiful than her bewildered mother.'

As Mrs. Roone ceased, Aveline threw her arms about her and burst into tears, while the remainder of the party rose involuntarily, and gathered round the mother and child.

Private interest and animosity were forgotten in sympathy, for no heart could refuse to feel for a pair who had come to their own through such strange means. Leonard, as chief worker in this dénouement, withdrew to a little distance, until he fancied sympathy had exhausted itself,

and Mrs. Roone and Aveline had recovered from their natural emotion. Then he suggested to Mr. Moore that he was sure Mrs. Roone had borne enough for one day, and would be happiest alone with her daughter. Mr. Moore, as present master of the manor, immediately asked them if they would like to be alone for awhile, and Aveline answered in the affirmative for both. Her mother was, indeed, in no state to reply for herself. She nearly fainted from the excitement she had passed through, and was supported by Aveline and Mr. Moore to the library, where, after awhile, she recovered. Her first words were a request that Leonard should join them. Mr. Moore returned to the dining-room and found him the centre of a group of questioning and, it must be allowed, aggrieved friends. He gladly escaped from them, leaving Mr. Moore in his place,

and was greeted by Mrs. Roone with a bright smile, and by Aveline with tears of joy.

'We owe it all to you!' exclaimed the former, holding out her hand.

He took it. Aveline also extended hers —and he pressed them both, affectionately.

'I have only fulfilled the squire's wish, and made wrong right,' he said, and the trio mutely vowed to be true to one another.

CHAPTER XVI.

TWO MADE ONE.

MRS. ROONE was, without question, heiress of Lisle Manor. There was no disputing the fact, and even Major Dallimore, after a little bluster, was compelled to acknowledge it. Indeed, Mrs. Roone and Aveline's pathetic story touched all hearts. The disappointed expectants were good, kindly people, and, after the first surprise was over, agreed that perhaps Mrs. Roone and Aveline would be preferable to a chancery-suit. There was not one villain in the piece, and the performers struggled to act their difficult, if unsensational, parts with becoming grace.

Aveline, the heiress-apparent, was the most overcome by the extraordinary dénouement to her pitiful tale. She insisted on the impossibility and impropriety of taking the manor from the very friends who had sheltered them; but Mr. Conquest assured her that her mother had no choice. The manor must go to sons or daughters, and, failing these, a will could invest any other person with the property. This the squire knew well enough, and doubtless conscience pricked him when he left the davenport to Leonard, knowing that he had a daughter somewhere.

Mr. Churchhouse suggested that Ratigan, the old coachman, might know something of his master's mind, as he had been much with him, and volunteered to question him. He lived in the village on his pension, and the vicar went to him. His memory was failing, for he was verging on eighty-five, but he recollected sufficient

to invalidate the statements of Mrs. Roone. He knew that his master lived a good deal from home—at Bristol and Bath—after Miss Cunninghame left. None of the servants, not even his valet, accompanied him. He, Ratigan, was with him when Miss Cunninghame came last to the manor. When she arrived, she could not speak, and died of heart-complaint almost immediately. The squire was in a terrible way, and shut himself up for weeks; then he went alone to Bristol.

Mr. Churchhouse asked if Ratigan had ever heard the squire mention the name of Roone. He thought he had—indeed, he remembered posting a letter to some one of that name for his master a few years before his death. Yes, it was to a Mrs. Roone, he believed.

This was all that could be gathered, but it tended to prove that Mr. Lisle had probably hazarded a letter to his daughter,

when she might have been in an asylum, her husband at sea. On such frail tenure hangs the destiny of individuals, and with this last piece of intelligence the family conclave dispersed, taking such leave of the interlopers as could be expected under the circumstances.

'You spoke as if you were "to the manner born," dear mamma,' said Aveline, when they were at last alone.

'It was for your sake, not mine, my child,' replied her mother. 'I hope there is a happy future before you, and certainly a useful one.'

'I feel like a culprit,' said the girl, bursting into tears, and hiding her face in her mother's lap.

A knock at the door, and enter the chevalier and madame.

'In tears, ma petite!' exclaimed the former. 'We come to felicitate you. Right always triumphs. Mrs. Roone, my

dear woife and I are glad you are lady of the manor.'

'We really are!' echoed madame, nervously.

Aveline started up and embraced her fervently.

'Take care of my crêpe, dear,' said madame, and Aveline knew that all was as it should be.

'Thou wilt permit me also, ma mie? We are now relatives,' hazarded the chevalier.

'Certainly, mon Alphonse. Forgive me my—my jealousy.'

And the chevalier kissed the three ladies on both cheeks, beginning with Mrs. Roone, and ending with his wife, six kisses in all. So the bloom returned to Aveline's cheeks, the joy to her heart.

'Before the day was done, the news spread from hall to kitchen, from manor to hamlet. The poor mad woman, the

nurse, was lady of the manor! was the daughter of Squire Lisle and Miss Cunninghame! The commotion and excitement were intense. This rapidity was mainly due to Lilywhite, to whom Mrs. Moore communicated the news while that amiable domestic was supplying Mrs. Roone's place during an access of weakness.

'Aveling's mother lady of the manor! Aveling Mr. Moore's great-niece and madame's second cousin! She a Blue-School girl just like me who has no relations! Well! if that isn't hard upon me who was at school seven years, and she only one,' exclaimed the aggrieved maiden.

'Go and ask them if they will kindly come to me in an hour's time, as I am too poorly to visit them,' said Mrs. Moore.

Poor Lilywhite! She must eat humble pie, and did not know how to begin. She

made the first bite by a modest tap at the door.

Mrs. Roone and Aveline were again alone for a few minutes.

'If you please, ma'am,' she began; but, seeing Aveline all smiles and tears, she hesitated, and finally ended her message by 'My, Aveling! you are a lucky girl!'

Aveline hastened to meet her, and held out her hand. Lilywhite began to cry.

'I'm sure I'm very sorry, and I don't want to leave the manor, and I've no friends in petticklar,' she sobbed.

'Why should you leave the manor? You have been so good to Mrs. Moore, and you know we are such old friends,' replied Aveline. 'If all this is true, which seems a dream, I'm sure you will be quite as kind to my dear mamma as—as—well, never mind. Let us begin a new life with new circumstances, and let us help those who

helped us. If only we could send the Blue School a hamper for Christmas.'

'You forget that it is holidays,' said Lilywhite, cheering up.

'Then I will ask Mr. Moore to send some game to our good mistress: I remember that she liked pheasant,' returned Aveline, looking at her mother.

'I think you need be under no apprehension, Lilywhite,' said Mrs. Roone, who sympathized with all friendless people, whether she liked them or not, 'and I feel sure your uncle will do what you wish, my darling.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' said Lilywhite, with a curtsey.

She was as much astonished as Aveline, to find the reserved, quiet Mrs. Roone equal to her change of fortunes. Indeed, continual trial and suffering had given her a composure and reticence that seemed almost incredible. This had been already

ascribed by the party she left in the dining-room to 'a touch of the squire's pride,' and perhaps, by nature, she inherited it; but affliction and the grace of God, had softened it to calm.

She and Aveline went to see Mrs. Moore as requested, but asked to be excused from joining the family party that evening at dinner. The excitement of the day had been too great for both, and they craved to be left to themselves. But they were again interrupted, and this time it was by Leonard Leigh. He was warmly welcomed, and fatigue and excitement were forgotten as the trio sat over the fire, discussing the events of the day. Aveline had much to learn, and her questions were incessant.

'Major Dallimore dined at the vicarage,' Leonard said, 'and I left him and the rest of the party reading the poor squire's letters, and comparing notes as to them and their own personal experience.'

'But for you, this mystery would never have been unravelled,' said Mrs. Roone.

'Rather but for the Guiding Hand,' returned Leonard.

'I should like you to tell Major Dallimore at once that, should there be any difficulty about the money accumulated during the life of the late heir, neither I nor Aveline will touch a penny of it,' said Mrs. Roone. 'If we are to come into these possessions, it must be without law or private dispute. Thanks to my uncle and you, all has been quietly achieved thus far, and I trust to you to do all that is handsome by the disappointed.'

'Dear mamma!' ejaculated Aveline.

'I wish, if possible, to shield my parents' memory from unnecessary blame. Would you say that I believe I was disinherited through my own obstinate conduct? I ought not to have married as I did, but Aveline, my child, has done no-

thing amiss, and for her I am thankful. She is now the possessor, or will be, God willing, of the fair lands she promised should be yours if she were "the lady born." She has my free and full permission to fulfil that promise.'

Mrs. Roone rose hastily, and, to Aveline's embarrassment, left the room.

'You remember that promise, Aveline?' said Leonard, after a momentary hesitation. 'When I asked what my fate would be were our positions reversed, your words were—how well I remember them!—"I would then give you all I had: all my wealth, all my baronial halls, all my fair lands, if they reached from down to sea." But when I asked for that dearest gift, your love, you put me off with a shallow subterfuge.'

'Because I was then of lowly birth, poor, and dependent; because my dear mamma had no one but me, no friends,

no money, no support,' replied Aveline, her manner assured, though her voice faltered.

'And now it is I, who am but the poor author, the secretary of uncertain tenure, the penniless friend. Yet I ask for your love in return for an almost life-long attachment.'

'You have been all in all to me ever since you comforted me in your uncle's library. I have loved you dearly from then till now,' returned Aveline, her beaming eyes uplifted unflinchingly to his.

And so those two were one.

'Mamma, dear mamma,' said Aveline, shortly afterwards, entering her mother's room.

'Is it as it should be?' questioned Mrs. Roone.

For answer, Aveline hid her sweet face

in her mother's, and received that beloved parent's blessing.

Ere many days elapsed, it evolved that Leonard Leigh was engaged to the daughter of the newly-found lady of the manor. The remarks consequent on this announcement may be readily imagined.

'He has played his own cards well, if he has ruined our game,' said Major Dallimore.

'And who could have supposed that Uncle Lisle had poked all those old letters into the davenport, just to give Leonard a chance of upsetting us all!' sighed his wife. 'Not that he could have done it had dear Lisle lived, for the will was clear enough. I always thought Leonard sly.'

'That is unjust, mamma,' said Quiz, who, in spite of still rankling jealousy, would not hear her hero maligned. 'He merely obeyed the squire's behest, and he

must have done so with immense pains and trouble. And it certainly is not his fault if the heroine of the musty letters turns out to be the Cunninghame you were all jealous of, and her successors. Certainly Leonard was fortunate when he was entrapped into a fancy for Aveline.'

'Who on earth entrapped him?' asked straightforward Isabella. 'You may as well say that you would have entrapped him if you could. I'm sure you tried hard enough.'

'Anyhow, he's a lucky dog, if I don't succeed in turning his good fortune,' said the major. 'But he is no great catch. A marquis, with a large property, is better than a poor author, Quiz, any day, and I hear my future son-in-law is handsome and elegant enough to please any woman.'

Quiz did not condescend to reply to these home-thrusts; but she felt them,

nevertheless, and longed for the time when she should be beyond their aim.

Leonard, meanwhile, was sure that invidious remarks would be made about him, but he consoled himself by the consciousness of honesty of purpose, and of having sought Aveline first when she was poor. Returned to London, he also returned to work. He found that the secretaryship would be but temporary, owing to the gradual recovery of the actual secretary; still he was told by his patron that another post would be found for him, if he desired it. But he still loved literature best, and resolved to pursue it, whether in town or country. Under all circumstances, he intended to work, and thereby to consolidate the name and fame he had already acquired. And in this determination he was upheld by Aveline and her mother.

CHAPTER XVII.

MORE WEDDINGS.

WE will now put on our seven-leagued boots, and leap from winter into summer. We find Aveline and her mother alone at the manor, and Mr. and Mrs. Churchhouse alone at the vicarage. Such are life's changes! Mrs. Roone has taken the name of Lisle, according to custom by law established, of such as inherit the manor. Her daughter is now Aveline Lisle, a name she will in time change to Leigh, to be again turned into Lisle, should she survive her mother, which, we are authorised to say, she will.

Mr. and Mrs. Moore left the manor, shortly after their somewhat disturbed Christmas, to visit their married sons, and afterwards to make a long-promised tour amongst friends in America. They and their newly-found nieces became much attached to one another during their sojourn in the same house. As to their son the captain, he received with tolerable equanimity the news that Leonard was preferred before him. He told the chevalier, when he delicately announced the event, that it was probably for the best, since he could never knock under to a wife. He had sought Aveline because she was poor and obedient; as an heiress, she might be overbearing. Certainly Leigh deserved her, for he had worked very hard to win her, and had succeeded, apparently, just as she turned out an heiress. The chevalier assured him that

Leonard had been quite as disinterested as himself, having proposed for her before she had any prospect of fortune.

'It is best as it is,' said Captain Moore. 'We are cousins, and they should not marry. You need not make my folly public, chevalier; for there are plenty of girls who would not refuse me.'

The chevalier was glad to find that the captain put such a good face upon it, and promised to be secret, though he was well aware that his wife had already betrayed him. This, however, did not interfere with his prospects, for he set to work at once to prove to everyone that he was not broken-hearted, by devoting himself to Helen Dallimore, whose sentimental and kindly nature was affected by hearing that he was a disappointed man. She laid herself out to console him, with no ulterior hopes, and, as is often the case,

flattered his vanity, while soothing his temper.

The chevalier and Madame d'Angère went back to Fontainebleau promising to be again at the manor for Aveline's marriage. The prospect of having Quiz within reach and in an exalted position, reconciled madame to France, while the knowledge that Aveline would be happy and his wife content, was sufficient for the unselfish chevalier. The vicar and his spouse were satisfied with the change of dynasties, for no sooner were Aveline and her mother established as owners of the manor, than they set to work to relieve the poor, to aid in the school, and to make the parish as happy and prosperous as they could. Old Ratigan, Biles, the sexton, and Dan Lane were not forgotten. Neither was the Blue School nor the workhouse. They were visited both personally

and by presents. The unpretending lady of the manor and her sweet, graceful daughter soon won golden opinions both from rich and poor.

Even Major Dallimore became reconciled to the course of events when he found that the money which had accumulated during Lisle's lifetime more than compensated him for what had been allowed by Chancery for the poor child's maintenance. Mrs. Roone was exact in paying him to the uttermost farthing of what, in her estimation, belonged to his son. She considered the manor to have been his, by will, as long as he lived, but believed it to be of right hers, by inheritance, now that he was dead. The accumulation of eleven years was considerable, and the major and his family were obliged to be content. They were, really, better off than they had ever been before.

It was long, however, before Mrs. Dalli-

more took any interest in what passed, and her children were surprised when, about a year after Lisle's death, she declared her intention of paying a visit to the manor. Quiz asked to be allowed to accompany her.

When they arrived, Mrs. Lisle and Aveline were in the library, their favourite room. It was the first time that the elder ladies had ever met, and the meeting was strangely awkward. Both naturally felt that, but for adverse events, Lisle Dallimore would have reigned where a stranger now ruled. But there was a quiet self-possession in Mrs. Lisle that reassured her visitor, whose tears flowed copiously at the sight of mother and daughter, and at the recollection of what might have been.

'I have been so very, very sorry for you. Aveline has told me all,' said Mrs. Lisle, simply, and the words broke down the slight edge of restraint that separated

the happy and unhappy mothers, and they were soon weeping together, hand in hand.

Meanwhile Aveline and Quiz had greeted one another with tolerable warmth, and stood aside, watching the meeting of their respective parents anxiously. Aveline's ready sympathy was aroused, and she longed to throw her arms round both, and console poor Mrs. Dallimore; but Quiz had not visited the manor with this intention. She had another object, and, as soon as she saw that the hands were grasped in friendly fashion, she whispered to Aveline,

'That will do. Mother will be better now. I want to speak to you alone. Come to the pond. We shall be quiet there.'

'We shall soon be back,' said Aveline, laying her hand gently on Mrs. Dallimore's shoulder, and smiling on her mother as she followed Quiz out of the library.

They found the pond and its delicious green setting cool where all else was

summer heat. The trees were alive with birds, the air with insects, the water with wild fowl—but the calm was perfect. Quiz threw off her hat and was silent a moment, remembering her interview with the chevalier. Aveline smiled, and sighed at the recollection of the boat scene. The dark, handsome, stern face of the one girl, contrasted with the fair, sunny, ever-changing countenance of the other.

'Let us sit down,' said Quiz at last, seating herself where she and the chevalier had sat when she showed him Captain de Bellefontaine's letter.

Aveline placed herself beside her. How sweet was the scene, how lovely the young girls—and how many a tale of love, joy, sorrow, disappointment had been told beside that silent pool!

'Aveline, I want you to be one of my bridesmaids,' said Quiz, abruptly, her face growing crimson.

'Me!' echoed Aveline, surprised. 'Me!'

'Yes—you. Why not? Are we not what the chevalier calls second German cousins? You will not refuse me?'

'Certainly not, if you really wish it. I shall be only too proud and happy.'

'Thank you. And Leonard is to be asked to be best man. Captain de Bellefontaine desires it, and so do I.'

Aveline did not dare to look at Quiz. She felt the inflection of her voice. It was enough. She needed not to see the flashing eye, the curling lip, the working nostril. But the self-command was perfect. If she had loved Leonard Leigh, no one but herself should know it: not even he whom she had loved. She did not pause to think whether he or Aveline might have discovered her attachment—they should, at least, learn that it was only a childish fancy.

'That is done!' she muttered, breathing

freely. 'One more thing, lest I forget it. I am really sorry, Aveline, for my part in that foolish play about the chevalier and Aunt Amicia. It amused me, that was all.'

'But it did not amuse me,' returned Aveline, gravely. 'Still, I never bore you or anyone else ill-will.'

'I am sure of that. The fact is, we were all jealous of you. No one likes to be superseded. And you were taking the first place in the affection of our kith and kin.'

'I think not. Madame only looked on me as—as what I was; though she would have loved me, but for——'

'But for our insinuations. Forgive us, Aveline, me especially. Believe me, you have now the best of it.'

Quiz put out her hand, and Aveline took it.

'If I have anything to forgive, I do so from my heart,' said Aveline.

Quiz looked up, and met her clear eyes.

'Thank you, Aveline. Kiss me, and wish me well.'

'I do, I have,' said Aveline, embracing her.

'Now let me tell you about the dresses,' cried Quiz, with a tremendous effort to conquer some inward emotion.

In another moment she was discussing bridal attire as if she had never had a thought or feeling beyond it, and Aveline was striving to feel an interest in what made her sad.

And thus ended the first romance of Miss Elizabeth Dallimore. She would now have another *rôle* to play.

The girls returned to the house, arm-in-arm, beneath their sunshades and the broiling June sun. They found their mothers also discussing their respective weddings, and afternoon tea awaiting them. Aveline presided at the tea-table,

and looked what she not only was but would be for many a long year, the sunshine of Lisle Manor.

'Then, I suppose, Leonard will give up the secretaryship,' said Mrs. Dallimore, sipping her tea.

'It gives him up,' replied Mrs. Lisle. 'The late secretary, who only resigned on account of ill-health, has quite recovered, and Leonard has relinquished the office to him.'

'Then, what will he do now?' asked Mrs. Dallimore.

'For the present he will devote himself to authorship and—to us,' replied Mrs. Lisle, glancing at Aveline. 'I cannot part with my child. When I am gone, a more public career will open to him.'

'Hush, dearest mamma!' cried Aveline, rising and laying her hand on her mother's mouth.

Mrs. Lisle smiled as she kissed the hand

and explained that Leonard had consented to relinquish London for a time, and to accept the management of the manor for her. There was much to do, and no one so fitted for the work as he. His success as an author was rapid, and he believed that he could write as well in the country as town, having no longer the intense anxiety of gaining a livelihood by his literary labours. He had already learnt that for the profession of literature some sort of backbone was necessary to support the labours of the brain—an income, in short, however small. Mrs. Lisle said that he would be quite independent, since he would not only possess the proceeds of his authorship, but the fruit of Squire Lisle's bequest.

Then she, in turn, heard from Mrs. Dallimore such particulars of the engagement of Quiz as she had not previously known, and these maternal confidences

tended to cheer Mrs. Dallimore, and to open the road to further intimacy with her new cousin. Aveline and Quiz were compelled to listen while their future prospects were thus discussed, and were not a little pleased when the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. and Mrs. Churchhouse.

Thus it came to pass that most of the *dramatis personæ* of this story gradually glided into natural and friendly relations, and, when the weddings above alluded to took place, there were—on the surface, at least—no impediments.

The beautiful Miss Elizabeth Dallimore and the aristocratic Captain de Bellefontaine were married first. Quiz contrived this, and comported herself with all bride-like propriety and composure. The wedding took place in the autumn, and Leonard and Aveline were present in their proposed capacities. Quiz shed no tears

when she left her native island for the Château de Bellefontaine, but looked haughty and queen-like as was her wont.

The following spring our hero and heroine followed her example, and, as heroes and heroines should, made the hearts of all around them 'sing for joy.' Parson and clerk, parent and adopted parents, domestics and villagers, the Lisle School and the Blue School, friends young and old, assembled to bid them God-speed, and to partake of Mrs. Lisle's hospitality. Old Biles was heard to say,

'They be the purtiest couple as ever I helped to marry. Who'd a-thought that the little gurl as I found in the squire's pew should be his own grandchild, and the mad 'ooman, as we called her, lady o' the manor!'

THE END.

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